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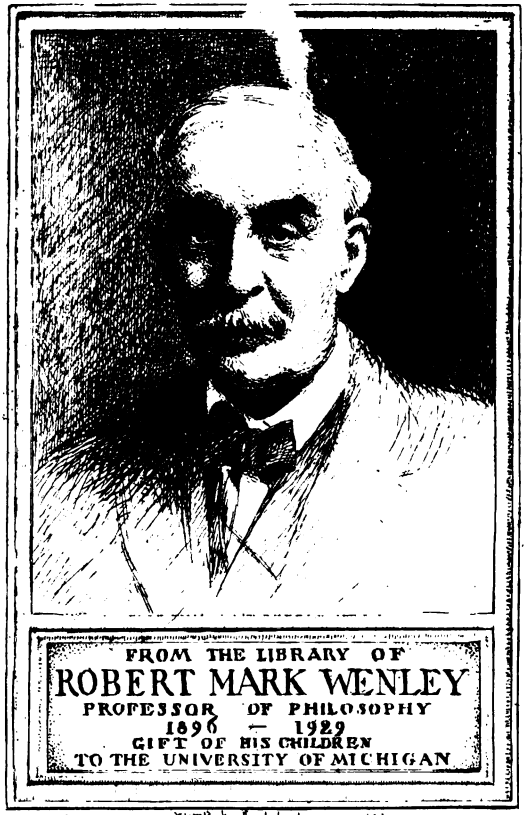

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19 July 88

THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST,

And other Sermons.

THE UNIVERSAL CHRIST,

And other Sermons:

PREACHED IN LIVERPOOL.

BY

CHARLES BEARD, LL.D.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

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AFTER my husband's return from Bournemouth last February, he yielded to the repeated wishes of many of his hearers, and marked the greater part of these sermons for publication. In completing the number which it was his intention to include in the volume, I have chosen those which seem to me to express his latest thoughts.

MARY ELLEN BEARD.

LIVERPOOL, *July, 1888.*

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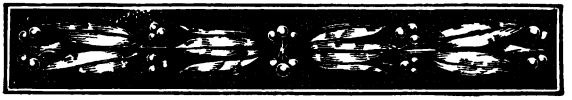


I.

The Universal Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS x. 4:

"For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ."

IN this somewhat obscure passage, Paul is usually supposed to allude to a Rabbinical tradition, which declares that in their wanderings through the desert the Israelites were accompanied by a miraculous rock, from which every night and morning abundant water flowed for their use. And of this legend, strange as it is in itself, he gives a mystical interpretation: "And that Rock was Christ." I will not attempt to decide what precise meaning we should put upon the Apostle's words, or to what extent we are to take the "spiritual meat" and the "spiritual drink" of the wilderness as prefigurements of the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper. The one point on which I wish to fix your attention is the idea that in some way or other—but at all events a

real way—Christ was with the Israelites in the desert, and that the source of their spiritual nourishment was the same as Paul made known and offered to the church of Corinth. In other words, there was in the Apostle's view a man Christ Jesus, a human figure of the first century, and a divine and universal Christ, always playing a part in the spiritual history of the race. There was a Christ who had been recently seen in the flesh by many, and a Christ who was a general spiritual fact. And perhaps the latter was to Paul the more real of the two. He thought less of Galilee and Jerusalem as the scenes of Christ's activity, than of the councils of Heaven and the long course of human history. And, at all events, it was no marvel to him that the Divine Personage who had long ago guided his people through the desert to the land of promise, slaking their daily thirst, and feeding them with food convenient for them, should have stooped down from heaven to remonstrate with his own obstinacy, and with a heavenly compulsion pressed him into his service.

The same idea appears in a more philosophical form in the proem to the Fourth Gospel, whose author, whoever he was, was much more of a systematic theologian than Paul. Here the determining words are: "That was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Paul, so far as it is fair to speak of his method at all, goes back from the

personal to the universal Christ: John, if it were indeed he, begins with the universality, and makes it the test of truth. A Light that was impersonate only in a single Christ, no matter how brilliant its manifestation, would not be the true Light: it must be the source of all illumination that men have ever received, the single sun of the spiritual sky. And observe how this author begins with the Word, the Light, in its union and companionship with God, in its relation to the all of things created, in its universal vivifying and inspiring energy, and only then goes on to the moment in time in which, as it were, confining itself within bounds and assuming human limitations, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." But with whatever minor differences, the Evangelist and the Apostle are at one in their central idea. There was a Christ that did marvels in Galilee, and taught in the streets of Jerusalem. There was a Word, a Light, always at work in the hearts and lives of men, holding up God before them, and pouring into them the impulse of love and service. And these two were the same Christ, in his particular and in his general manifestation.

I do not wonder that from this idea was developed in due time a metaphysical doctrine of Christ's pre-existence; that pre-existence, logically formulated, was felt to be an impossible resting-place for the systematizing intellect; and that finally, to avoid the

danger of Ditheism—a supreme and a subordinate Deity side by side—the Athanasian theory of an equality of Divine Persons in the Trinity was adopted. The steps of the process are quite clear, both in their abstract justification and as written in the history of the first Christian centuries. This is, indeed, the way in which dogmas always grow up. First, there is a profound and pregnant conception, answering, so far as a human thought can answer, to a divine truth. It is not adequate: it does not embrace every aspect of the fact: it is not always consistent with itself: but it is a new light: it is a clue out of perplexity: it is felt to resolve many difficulties. Then come the theologians, and re-cast it in the mould of their logic. They are for the most part system-makers; and to build up a system asks for no divine intuition, no piercing gaze into the mingled light and darkness in which faith dwells, no meditative waiting for God's dispersion of the gloom. On the contrary, men who are profoundly convinced of the depth and darkness of Divine Being, and the inadequacy of human powers to sound it, do not build systems at all: if there comes light enough to live by, they are content. So, it seems to me, all those philosophical definitions of the nature of God of which the creeds are full, are just hardened and coarsened statements of great truths, which seers have seen in a moment of divine enlightenment, and which contract a taint of falseness and narrowness from

the form into which they are thrown. And religion is, in them, exposed to a double danger. The orthodox believer may very well mistake the shell for the kernel; the heterodox critic, rejecting the shell, may forget that there is still a kernel within it.

It is in this way that, over against and in opposition to the doctrine of the Deity of Christ, has been developed that of his pure and absolute humanity. In more than one very important sense, the latter doctrine must be accepted as true: believers in the Trinity will tell you that they are as far as possible from denying it. And yet at the same time it may very well, in some of the forms which under the exigencies of controversy it has assumed, miss elements of truth which are of the greatest importance, and become almost as false as the doctrine which it is intended to deny. For the age-long controversies of theologians have succeeded in completely hiding the real point at issue; and the known facts of the case are buried beneath successive layers of theory which have been heaped upon them by men whose words ill expressed their thoughts, and whose thoughts had no exact correspondence with things. That point is, What are the conditions of inspired humanity? How are we to understand and account for the Christ? What makes the prophet? Whence the uplifting which sometimes comes even to feeble souls like ours? Are all these things part of one series of spiritual phenomena, and

if so, what law holds them together? To repeat any or all the clauses of the Athanasian Creed, teaches us, it seems to me, absolutely nothing—nay, leads us astray, in as far as it persuades us that the repetition of words which we do not understand *has* taught us something. But to answer the questions which I have asked, though never so imperfectly, will lead us, step by step, into such secret places of Divine purpose as are accessible to mortal foot.

The great thing is to believe that there is "a Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world:" what we call that Light—God, or Christ, or the Word, or the Spirit—a matter of quite secondary importance. This belief includes two main points: first, that the source of all inspiration and enlightenment is one and the same; and next, that no human soul is without its connection with the Divine Fountain. The first thought takes us to a point of view from which we see that there are not many truths, but one truth; not many strengths, but one strength; not many goodnesses, but one goodness; not many religions, but one religion. All we know of God, whether it be much or little, comes from God: it is not that what I know is true, and what you think you know, false; but that both of us are looking up to the same central Sun, and each receiving what light he can. There are travesties of religion, I know, which do not deserve the name—devil-worships, which make men fouller and

crueller than they were before; but of real religions, breathing awe into the soul, quickening the sense of duty, bridling unruly passions, nerving the shrinking will, none can rightly be called false. Whatever lifts man nearer to a perfect God must be true: it is only a question of more or less, of comparative purity or large alloy. It would not be too much to say—strangely as the word may clash upon Christian prejudice—that the truth of religion varies from man to man; for what to any soul is true, of this kind, is also compelling, and measures its truth by its power of transforming it into something better than itself. Is Buddhism false to one man, whom it makes patient, pure, pitiful, humble, full of a sacred awe? Is Christianity true to another, whom it leaves hard, cold, selfish, cruel, foul? There is but one Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, and where it dwells is plain, because darkness abideth not with it.

And the second great point is, that no man is wholly without this Light. All the disputes which arise out of the theology of the Fall we brush away: all allegations that if man is by nature in direct communication with God, he lost that high privilege by fault of Adam's transgression, have been deprived of their force by the new light that streams upon primeval history. I have sometimes thought that the early Quakers put this part of the truth in the clearest

way, when they said that in every man there was a seed of Christ, which under fit cultivation blossomed and bore fruit, but which under no conceivable circumstances lost the possibility of germination. Or, again, as some of the much maligned Anabaptists, who raised a spiritual rebellion against the rigid and formal scripturalism of Luther and Melancthon, put it—there is in every soul an inner Word, a secret Christ, which contact with the personal Christ wakes into life and activity. And it is manifest that this is a spiritual fact which exists in every stage and degree of development. There, covered up by the ruins of a base and self-indulgent life, is some poor remnant of better feeling, some latent possibility of repentance and reform, some sleeping faculty of moral growth, which may prove the beginning of better things, in another life, if not in this. And here, again, the light is struggling with the darkness, strength with weakness, the attraction of God with the temptations of the flesh, the beauty of Christ with the inertia of the world, producing everywhere that mixed result of which we never dare to be too hopeful, of which we will not venture to despair, the life of man in the body. Sometimes the light streams through the rifts and cracks of the poor human lantern in which it is tabernacled, with such pure effulgence as to approve to all men its divine origin and power; as when a prophet, otherwise a poor, feeble, ignorant mortal, speaks of divine

things in so sweet and piercing a voice that men listen and obey, knowing that it is a word of God. And once at least in human history, the Light in which is no darkness at all has manifested itself in a splendour so steady and so unsullied, that seers and sages have bowed down before it, rejoicing in its brightness, and saying, Lo, now hath the Divine Word taken flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth!

Looked at in the light of this broad principle, how many of the controversies which have most deeply agitated Christendom are seen to be matters of nomenclature only! I am what is called a humanitarian: I believe in the pure humanity of Christ: and while I am ready to offer to him all the homage that is due to consummate goodness, while I place him on a pinnacle above all other teachers, while I own that no other obligations to my fellow-men approach in width and weight those under which I stand to him, I do not address to him the worship which, in my view, belongs only to God. I distinguish between God Himself and His most signal self-manifestations: I can see Him in nature, in history, in humanity, in my own soul: but under none of these forms, behind none of these veils, can I worship Him: if I am to worship Him at all, I must breathe my prayer into the silent and boundless heaven, trusting that it will reach, how I know not, an ear of infinite compassion. But for all that, I understand what Paul meant when he said,

"And that Rock was Christ," even though I might now choose other words to express the same thought. When a man has once learned to believe and say that Christ was strength, purity, goodness, he will not think it much if another inverts the phrase, and whenever he sees strength, purity, goodness, calls them Christ. Men needed these things in that long and toilsome passage through the wilderness. The mass of the people were foolish, fickle, ungrateful: demoralized by long servitude in Egypt: apt to remember the luxuriant fertility of the river-land as they encamped in the sun-smitten and barren gorges of Sinai: accustomed to a thousand majestic idols, and therefore slow to believe in the unseen God who dwelt between the Cherubim. For a moment they had acclaimed and trusted a hero; and some began to lament their too enthusiastic faith, as food and water grew scarce, and the hostile tribes pressed upon them, and the land of promise seemed very far off. Out of one strong, steadfast soul had to come patience, fortitude, inspiration for all: the almost impossible work which Moses had to accomplish was to make a nation of free men out of a horde of fugitive slaves. He accomplished his life's work: do you think in his own strength, or in that which God gave him? And so long as we recognize the central fact that his strength was not his own, but given from on high, is it a great thing that we should call it Word, or Spirit, or Light, or Christ?

For all these are the manifestations of the Living God.

So, again, in regard to the Quaker doctrine of the Divine Seed, to the Anabaptist theory of the inner Word, in their relation to ourselves and our own religious life, the one thing is that we should recognize the divine possibility within and strive to make it more. What matter names in relation to that which is essentially nameless? All the words which I have been using, all the words that I could possibly use, are metaphors more or less inapt, taken from physical facts, and corresponding only by analogy to the phenomena of the spiritual life, which will not be named, and in their essence defy definition and description. There is a word, an intellectual principle within us, which corresponds in a marvellous way with the organized and ordered universe outside of us. There is a faint and feeble light of conscience which, flicker as it may, is yet kindled from the supernal light, in which is no darkness at all. There is a seed of grace which may sleep within us through years of dull selfishness, yet wake to life and growth at last. There is a spark of enthusiasm for holiness which may glimmer long without breaking into a blaze, and yet some day, breathed upon by the breath of God, may burn up all that is mean and base within us. There is a Spirit—not our own—blowing like the wind as it listeth, coming and going in obedience to no law that we

can detect, to which, if we yield ourselves without reservation, we find ourselves filled with the strength of God. And even in the worst and weakest of us, in the besotted and the fallen, in those over whom love mourns as hopeless, and patience wrings her hands in despair, there is a Christ, defamed, contemned, mocked, crucified, yet never without a divine energy of salvation. Do these things seem overstrained to you? It is because you have not faith enough in yourselves, in human nature, in God. We are more and better than we know. We are children of the King, even though we have forgotten our royal inheritance. It is for ourselves to raise the nobleness of our life to the nobleness of our origin. Quench the Spirit, extinguish the Light, deny the Word, make of no avail the Christ, we cannot—for that, God is too good; but if only we could enter upon our birthright, if only we could yield ourselves wholly up to life! O come, thou Spirit of the Living God, rebuke our cowardice and faithlessness, and make us all Thine own!

II.

Until He find it.

LUKE xv. 4:

"Until he find it."

I HAVE mentioned to you more than once before, what a powerful hold the idea of the Good Shepherd, as presented here and further developed in the Fourth Gospel, took of the imagination of the first century. The Roman Catacombs, those touching and strangely significant memorials of early Christian thought and feeling, are full of it. Among many scriptural symbols, all easily lending themselves to pictorial illustration, this indisputably takes the first place. It came with its divine lesson of love upon minds which had not yet wholly emancipated themselves from pagan associations; and I dare not say that the Good Shepherd of the Catacombs does not sometimes remind the critical eye of the young Apollo, who, as old poets sang, once fed the flocks of Admetus, or of Pan, the god of all jocund

and happy rural life. He is there in every variety of his occupation: going before his flock, as they seek or return from the green pastures: giving them drink at the clear streams of eternal life: carrying the lambs in his bosom, bringing back the lost sheep upon his shoulder. The imagery is so simple, so winning, so easy of interpretation, so redolent of love and peace and safety, as to be necessarily among the very first to inspire the efforts of sacred art. And possibly at a later time, when persecution had already begun to accomplish its hateful work, and it became a question in the Church whether those who had once failed in their allegiance were ever to be received back again into communion, it was a divine instinct of pity which, in one instance at least, portrayed the Good Shepherd as bearing back to the fold, safely sheltered in his own arms, not a sheep, but a goat.

"Until he find it." These words, repeated a few verses further on in the parable of the Lost Piece of Silver—as if to show how completely they belonged to the essence of the lesson—flashed upon me, the other day, from the page of the Gospel, as if they, and they alone, had been printed in letters of gold. And they seemed to me, all at once, instinct with a great fact and a wonderful promise. For Christ's life is all a parable of God's purposes: and if naturally all Christian ages have personified him as the Good Shepherd, that similitude must much more belong to God,

and describe His dealings with His human children. And what a comfortable thought is this, that the Divine Love is always seeking for the lost sheep, nor will cease to seek till all are brought back and safely folded: that not one, even the lowest, the most degraded, the most brutalized, is forgotten, or neglected, or left without needful warning or kind invitation: that God is at work with us whenever we try to take a fallen fellow-creature by the hand, and to lift him into a nobler conception of his humanity: nay, that He is perpetually working in wider and deeper and subtler ways, which shame and perhaps sometimes even thwart our poor and shallow schemes! Do we then cry out that we would see this more clearly, and ask for more evident result of all this expenditure of an energy which we must think of as omnipotent? In all our theories of God's moral relation to the world which are to be in the true sense of the word religious, we must assume, I think, a free will in man, a power of choice, a faculty of resistance even to grace: the All-powerful compels no one, but wins where He might coerce, persuades where He might command, and asks for the willing allegiance of the spirits which He has created free. It is not for us to prescribe times and to fix occasions. Possibly in no other way could we so effectually ensure ourselves against disappointment, as in concentrating our energies upon work and love, and leaving success to God. Or if this

be too high a flight of faith to be always sustained—perhaps ever to be reached except by a strong wing here and there—may we not find some consolation in the thought, that there is not a soul in this great city of ours—no child born in corruption and bred in vice, and irretrievably soiled by sin ere ever it knew what whiteness was—no miserable drunkard, long abandoned to the hopeless slavery of his own weakness—no lost woman who can never expect restoration to the self-respect which has passed from her like a forgotten dream of girlhood—no single soul, which the patient love of God is not seeking "until He find it"?

This is a view of things from which such religion as calls itself liberal is to some extent slipping away. I am heartily sorry for it. For a thousand reasons I shrink from defining what religion is, and much more from branding any views which my neighbour holds as irreligious. If he honestly holds them, and draws from them some measure of strength and comfort, I can find no fault with him, even though I feel that they would hardly be so helpful to me. Still I must speak from my own point of view, and it is impossible that I should see without regret religion descending, as it seems to me, to a lower plane of vividness, and penetration, and efficacy among men. I know too well that it is possible to believe with a very firm faith in God, and yet to conceive of His moral action as much more characterized by the sweep-

ing universality of law than by the changeful flexibility—if I dare use such a phrase—of love. We are subjects, says this theory, of a very wise, even if of a stern and inexorable rule: all is for the best, on the large scale and in the long run, though it may be doubted whether the good of all includes the good of each, and whether the losers in the game have any other consolation than that heroic one of self-sacrifice. It is of no use praying: God will not turn out of His course an hair's-breadth for us: and spiritual blessings descend by unchangeable law as surely as the fertilizing rains. I do not say that this theory has not an inestimable advantage over that which would reduce everything to law without a God; which would take away praise and aspiration as well as petition; which would make us mere links in a chain of necessity, and bid us confine our thoughts and hopes to our poor threescore years and ten. But if it is religion, it certainly is not Christianity; for that is, above everything else, the doctrine of the Fatherhood of God. It is not enough, judging belief from the Christian standpoint, to believe that God is: that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, in the general sense that "somehow good will be the final goal of ill:" that the affairs of mankind are so ordained from the beginning as to produce the effect of a law of moral gravitation. To place ourselves where Christ stood, we must go back to the thought of an earlier and a simpler time—

a time, perhaps, of less astute speculation and less finished logic, but a time of deeper and truer insight—and feel that, insignificant units as we are of the mass of humanity, light and unimportant as is our impact upon the general fate, God yet loves us, and bends down to us, and helps us to play our personal part in the development of his wise designs. The world is the empire of the Omnipotent, we know; but we want it also to be the home of our souls. We live under the sway of a wise and just King, but we need too to feel the touch of our Father's hand.

These things, it is superfluous to remark, are not mutually exclusive—the wider includes the narrower, the greater the less. But I cannot help thinking that whether Law or Love makes the first and deepest impression upon our minds, greatly depends upon the side on which we approach the problem of existence. Look at the world in the mass, and it is very difficult to reconcile its incontrovertible facts with the thought of God's fatherly love patiently searching for the erring soul "until He find it." We cannot help admitting that, from the human and practical point of view, much of the sin and misery which surround us is hopeless. We fall back indeed, and rightly, upon the omnipotence of God's grace, and the fact that, to the heart's last feeble beat, there is always the possibility of repentance and return. We accuse ourselves, and again rightly, of a selfish and cowardly inertness in the cause

of humanity, and confess that our irresolution delays the kingdom of God. But at the same time we know that if we, and all like-minded with us, did our best, there would be much that remained undone, and that woful defeat would still balance and sadden our victory. There are hardened and befouled natures which we do not even know how to approach, to which our exhortations have no meaning, and our persuasions no sweetness. There are others in which a natural, a swift, an irresistible gravitation towards vice, almost startles us into a belief in a destiny which will not be gainsayed. There is the large class of what I may call victims: the weaklings whom the ponderous car of what we suppose to be social progress crushes beneath its wheels: too feeble either to grasp the opportunities or to resist the temptations of our fevered civilization, and who strew its path with human wreck and ruin. We see these things here on the large scale: it seems to be the law of great cities that on the very skirts of wealth and luxury and high culture and fine aspirations and eager charity, should sit squalid poverty, blank despair of life, reckless self-indulgence, insolent vice. And it is very hard to believe, I sorrowfully admit, that in the midst of that moral chaos God's love is always patiently at work, changing it into a beautiful and orderly world, of which nothing shall be wasted, in which nothing shall be lost.

But begin at the other end, confine your inquiry to

the only life of which you really know anything, go down into the depths of your own memory, and confess whether or not God has not often sought and found *you.* I am not speaking now of visions and revelations: these are not days of spiritual upturning, and we are but ordinary folk: and yet I do not deny that in some lives these may have a natural and profitable place. But is there any one amongst us who does not feel that some circumstances of his lot have had a strange personal reference, which seemed, as it were, to be a secret between himself and the unseen Orderer of his fate—in which, to put it religiously, God sought and found and laid His hand upon him? I cannot enumerate all possible cases of this kind, and so touch a sympathetic chord in every heart; yet you all, I think, cannot help knowing what I mean. Two human beings are brought face to face by what seems a mere freak of circumstance, and at the same time two hearts find each a mate, and two lives are knit evermore in one. The same rule holds in friendship as in love: here companionship is born at school and survives all separation: here friends are drawn together, as by subtle magnetic attraction, from the very ends of the world. A book taken up to amuse an idle hour changes the current of a life; and sometimes a word, of no special force or edge, yet spoken when the soul was sensitive to every passing air of influence. There is a side of most men's natures on which they

are more open to God than on others: wise words of old time win some, when freshly spoken; and others, words which they have heard a thousand times before, yet which all at once seem full of new meaning: a glorious work of art lifts some spirits heavenward, as music enfolds and carries aloft others, in a storm of pious ecstasy: this soul is flooded with God as it hangs between wild sky and wilder sea, the plaything of the tempest—that, as from commanding height it looks out upon fertile plain and winding river and deep woods, and wonders at the beauty and the bounty which God lavishes upon man. Is it not a commonplace to insist upon the constancy with which God seeks and finds us in adversity and disappointment and death, not so much as if He were tired of being good to us, as resolved to make Himself known in privation to hearts that rejected or only half-accepted Him in blessing? Have I read your souls aright? Have I, with any approach to accuracy, interpreted your own experience? Are you not able, so far as you have yet advanced on life's journey, to say at this point, Here God led me—and at that, Here He bid me stay? Do you not feel that in so far as you have discerned and obeyed the Divine guidance, life has been strong and peaceful and happy, and that all error and weakness and unrest have sprung, only too manifestly, from self-will? And if this is, as I believe it to be, the secret history of every religious heart, why

should we suppose our own experience to be singular and like no other? Does God care for us alone, or set our souls at a higher price than those of the harlot or the thief?

At the same time, it is important to remember that we cannot separate in thought our own work from God's. 'In so far as we are able to do any good work at all, we are His instruments: it is by men, at least in part, that He works upon men; and the faithfulness of the preacher, the patient toil of the missionary, the unwearied kindness of the nurse, the long labour of the schoolmaster, are, whatever may seem to be their dependence upon human goodwill, in another sense manifestations of His omnipresent activity. And I cannot but think it another proof of the truth of this fundamental principle of religion on which I am insisting, that when it lives upon persuasive lips and in an eager spirit of charity, men's hearts, even the foulest and the coldest, leap up in answer to it. If only you can persuade men or women that, no matter how far gone they may be in defiance of Him and His will, God still loves them—that if only they will turn to Him in sorrow and contrition, He is willing and waiting to forgive—that it is never too late to repent, and the way always open to unblamed life—your words will come down like summer's rain upon the thirsty soil, and the seeds of good, that no drought of the Spirit can wholly kill, may yet spring to life,

and blossom and bear fruit in their season. Believe me, this is the secret of the power which revivalist preachers, crude and coarse as we may think them, sometimes exercise upon hard and brutal minds, which more refined ministrations are powerless to touch. It is not that they are scared by the flames of hell—fear saves no souls: they are not whipped back to goodness, like beaten hounds crouching under the lash. All that the image of the pit can do is to heighten by contrast the winning charm of Divine Love. *They* do not ask if the theory of atonement will logically hold together, or inquire from whom they are saved, or what moral principles are observed or violated in the transaction. The one fact that shines clearly forth is, that after a life of weakness, wickedness, neglect of God, contempt of duty—sinking ever into profounder depths of sin against themselves and humanity—God still loves them, and has sent His Son to seek and to save them. And that is enough.

"Until He find it." Surely this word involves a promise as well as states a fact. So far, perhaps half-unconsciously, we have chiefly dwelt upon God's search of men: we have felt that He stretches out His hands upon us, and so have found it not impossible to believe that He works also in that thick darkness where we cannot follow Him. But He searches until He finds. His love is not baffled, even by man's utmost stretch of perversity. The Good Shepherd cannot be content

until every sheep is safely folded; even if He spend the night in watch and search, a daybreak there will surely be at last at which the flock shall be for ever complete. Do you not discern what great doctrinal inference is involved in this thought? We cannot prove the future life by any arguments based on Science: much rather does Science coldly turn her back upon our wistfulness, and is even unwilling that we should "faintly trust the larger hope." Physical difficulties seem to roll a stone over the mouth of every grave: all we can do, in face of them, is to fall back on our own ignorance, and trust that material things may not be what they seem. But if there be a God of omnipotent Love, can we believe that that Love is mocked? And mocked it undoubtedly is if this life be all: if into the same blank nothingness with the hero, the philanthropist, the philosopher, the saint, descend all maimed and shattered lives, the wrecks and the failures of humanity—those who have never known God here, and, if this dark unfaith be true, shall never know Him. Those whom He has enriched with blessing—those who have lived a strong and rounded life—those who have fed full upon knowledge—those from whom life has gone forth—those, in a word, whom God *has* found—may go down to the grave without hope of rising again, and yet with the feeling that the purposes of existence have, in their day of light, been at least in part realized;

though here, too, comes in the thought that there are no bounds to life in God and knowledge of God, and that His touch upon the spirit once felt is eternal life. But the lost who on earth are not saved, the weak who are not made strong, the foul who are not purified, the brutal who are not reclaimed to humanity—these the Good Shepherd seeks, I cannot but think, even through an eternity, "until He find them." Would that we, from whom in our plenitude of blessing He is never far off, might go forth to meet Him in the way, and follow Him with docile steps to the fold where the pastures are always green and the waters of life never cease to flow!

III.

The Indian's Grave.

1 CORINTHIANS xiii. 3:

"And though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

IT is not impossible that in these words, which are usually taken as only an example of the Apostle's vivid and impetuous rhetoric, we have an accidental meeting-point—the only one, so far as I know, that exists—between Buddhism and Christianity. A story is told by classical writers of an embassy sent to Augustus by Porus, an Indian king, attached to which was a fanatic, who, under what circumstances we are not informed, publicly burned himself at Athens. The sacrifice was by no means without precedent. Plutarch tells us of one Calanus, an Indian sage, Brahman or Buddhist, who, accompanying Alexander the Great westwards, deliberately burned himself alive at Babylon, rather than undergo the annoyance of a disease which does not appear to

have been either very painful or very dangerous. And Josephus puts a speech into the mouth of Eleazar, in the last agony of the Jewish war, in which he fortifies the fellow-countrymen whom he was addressing in the intention of suicide, by the example of Indian wise men who avoided the ills of disease and old age by a voluntary exit at the gate of fire. But we are able to establish a possible connection between Paul and the Hindoo who burned himself at Athens in Augustus' time. According to Plutarch, his tomb was one of the sights of the city. It bore the inscription: "Zarmanochegas, the Indian, from Bargosa, who, after the fashion of his Indian forefathers, made himself immortal, lies here." Now Zarmanochegas is evidently the same word as Iramana-karja, which means "teacher of the ascetics," and shows that its owner was not Brahman, but Buddhist; while Bargosa may be taken as identical with Barygaza, a city in which we know Buddhism flourished at the beginning of the Christian era. What more likely than that Paul, whose eye had been attracted by the inscription, "To the Unknown God," should have seen this also, and should have heard the story of the strange self-immolation, which was yet fresh in the minds of men?

This point of contact between Buddhism and Christianity cannot count for much: it is purely accidental: and however probable the interpretation of Paul's words, there is still an element of uncertainty in it.

But at least it touches the imagination; and I am not sure that, to the student of history, that is not the great thing. Familiar as we are with Buddhism, in its vast Eastern ramifications, as a contemporary religious fact, we are apt to forget that it is five hundred years older than Christianity, and before Christ was born had run its first triumphant course, and undergone corruption and reform, and developed into sects, and manifested its whole character, though not its whole efficacy, as a world-religion. There are some eccentric theorists who wish to make out that, through Essenism, Buddhism may have had a direct influence upon Christianity. But the connection between Christianity and Essenism is much more one of conjecture than of proved fact; while the little we know of the Essenes has at all periods of active criticism encouraged wild statements as to the origin and effect of their characteristic doctrines. No; there is a very real interest in the strange similarities between Buddhism and Christianity, but it does not lie in the attempt to connect them by any line of historical affiliation, so much as in the testimony which they bear to the identical development of the religious principle in man at all ages and under all circumstances. Buddhism is Aryan; Christianity, Semitic: the one traces its origin to the impressions of the natural beauty and grandeur made upon the forefathers of our own race under the shadow of the

Himalayas; the other's story is written in those records of Hebrew faith and life with which we are so familiar: each appeals to different peculiarities of race and character, and it is not till the first centuries of the Christian era that the Aryan learns to think Semitic thoughts and to speak with a Semitic tongue. But no one can help being struck with the similarity between the stories of Christ's life and those of the Buddha; while centuries after, when Jesuit missionaries pursued their proselytizing work in the farthest East, they marvelled at the apparent imitations of their own developed Catholicism which they found there, and declared Buddhism a thing invented of the devil to make a mock of Christianity and to delude true believers. And all the while, if only they had known, there was very little marvellous in the matter. Religions, both in the dawn of their strength and in the maturity of their corruption, necessarily have a root of likeness in them. All reformers burn with indignation against the same woes and wrongs, and attempt to redress them in the same way. The primitive faiths on which their own souls are stayed, and to which they labour to bring back their fellows, do not vary from land to land, or from age to age. Presently the same slackness steals over men's hearts, the same spiritual misapprehensions are made: the external is confounded with the internal, asceticism displaces duty: belief supersedes faith, forms smother life. The

sublimity of Buddhist morals, the absurdities of Buddhist monasticism, belong to the same order of facts as the like things in the history of Christianity: they spring from the same human roots, and are developed under the pressure of the same laws. But there is no reason to suppose that either has been copied from the other.

There is a subtle transition of meaning between the first and second clause of this verse which must not be neglected if we would catch the Apostle's full intention. "Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor—and have not charity:"—here the antithesis strikes at one of the commonest of all religious illusions, and an illusion into which it is particularly easy to fall in regard to this special grace of life—the confusion of the outer act with the inner spirit. There are a thousand ways in which we may simulate the effects of love; but without love itself, the inspiring, informing, regulating, purifying affection, they are all unprofitable. And this is so much a commonplace of our condition of religious thought and life; so warns us against a danger which lies in wait for us every day, as to hide from us the fact, that when Paul goes on to say, "though I give my body to be burned," he has passed on to other moral ground. Why Zarmanochegas burned himself, we are not told: it may have been, as in the case of Calanus, utter contempt of death, mingled with impatient weariness of life: it may have

been—such manifestations are not unknown in the East—the proud exhibition of a fierce and self-reliant fanaticism. No doubt the Athenians hardly understood the spectacle on which they wonderingly gazed: the fashion of suicide which infected the first century was much more Roman than Greek, and was wont to find for itself easier ways than that of fire; and probably before Paul's time the "Indian's Grave" at Athens was a sight at which strangers stared without asking or receiving any moral explanation of its story. But I fancy that Paul would feel a certain impatience, not distantly akin to contempt, at such an unpractical manifestation of religion. When Plutarch tells the story of the self-immolation of Calanus, we are cheated into a certain brief admiration of his heroism, as we hear how he calmly walked up to the funeral pyre which he had caused to be erected for himself, and lay down upon it, wrapped in his cloak, nor betrayed by sound or motion any consciousness that the lapping flames were folding him in their deadly embrace. And it is only when we recollect that all this was to escape from bodily inconvenience and pain, which men of a less theatrical bravery bear every day without complaint or neglect of duty, that the unreality of the whole thing breaks in upon us, and we perceive that our admiration is thrown away. Paul, I think, was eminently resolute and patient. The period of his active ministry was not long, but it was filled to the

brim, as we know, with perils and persecutions. He made equal trial of the long languors of delay and disappointment and prison, and the sharp spasms of bodily danger and anguish. His sensitive spirit laid him peculiarly open to every kind of moral depression and disquietude. He always carried about with him the mysterious trouble of "the thorn in the flesh." Yet he never ceases to think life worth living, if only he can accomplish anything in his divine vocation. Though he is "in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better," yet so long as he is assured that "to abide in the flesh" is better for those to whom his life is given, he knows "that he shall abide and continue with them for all their furtherance and joy of faith." The fact is, that he has escaped from the personal ground of religion altogether; and in so escaping has not only set his soul in a large place, but has found a clear and authoritative rule of life. He lives for others—to serve Christ, to hasten the kingdom of God, to bring good news to the weary and heavy-laden; and what does it matter how weary and heavy-laden with the distresses of the spirit and the infirmities of the flesh he may himself be, so long as he can speak one true word for good, against evil strike one stout and faithful blow?

So far, then, as I can read Paul's thought in this place, the contrast in his mind is that between the practical and the unpractical. He is impatient of

sacrifices without a purpose. He thinks little of self-denials in which all that is not gymnastic is self-display. An action which, whatever the fine qualities which it requires and involves, begins and ends in the region of self, has no attractiveness for him. I suppose that many men have felt that James' celebrated definition of true religion, "to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world," laid somewhat too much stress upon its outward manifestation, too little upon its inner spring; yet here Paul, if I interpret him rightly, is in full accord with it. No doubt there is another point of view from which it is all-important that we should *be* something, and the building up of character is the chief thing: is it not this which Paul himself means when in this very verse he contrasts the spirit of love with the form of charity? I know it: it is in this way that we have to look at great moral and religious truths, first on this side and then on that, till at last we compel them to reveal their whole harmonious, symmetrical meaning. But the particular aspect of truth upon which Paul is dwelling in the words of the text is, that human life is made up of many affections, many interests, many duties; that society is a busy, living, complex organism, moved in many ways by competing and conflicting forces; and that no man has attained the secret of existence who is not willing and able to go down into the turmoil, and there to

think and act and endure as wisely and as faithfully as he can for the general good. On one side, it is true, religion is the personal communion of the soul with God; but on the other, it is a social instinct, perpetually seeking and finding work and gratification: prayer is its undoubted voice, yet no less work; purity is the very breath of its nostrils, but it cannot live without kindness. If, indeed, a man have unconquerable resolution, I can fancy Paul saying, Let him use it, not in building and mounting his own funeral pyre, but in some strong conflict with evil for the brethren's sake. Courageous patience may be best displayed, not in the sharp agony of self-conscious asceticism, but in the forgetfulness of self in the quiet discharge of daily duty. What object in the gymnastic of the soul, if the thews and sinews which it develops are never to be put to any nobler use than to bear with unyielding rigidity the blows of fate? All things are ours, the Apostle would have said, and we are Christ's: let us gather up our treasure of occasion, affection, faculty, only that we may lay them down at his feet, to be spent in the service of struggling, suffering humanity.

To find Christian parallels to the self-immolation of Zarmanochegas, we must go to the Roman Catholic Church, and there perhaps our lesson, though true enough, will miss applicability to ourselves. Paul, we are wont to think, not without justification, was a

Protestant Apostle; yet it would not be difficult to show that he has been greatly misapprehended by Protestants. There is the doctrine of personal salvation, for instance, which is supposed to find its chief support in his writings—a doctrine which, if nowhere formulated in exact words, yet runs through the whole of evangelical practice. According to it, the first question which a man has to ask himself is, What must I do to be saved? and thereafter, whether that question be satisfactorily answered or not, the chief object of his attention and concern is the state of his own soul. It may seem a bold affirmation to make, but I believe Paul thought very little about his own soul at all, and would probably have been better satisfied with himself if he had been able to think less. Inward fears and doubts and irresolutions, any turning within of thought and affection, he would have regarded, I am persuaded, as so much weakening and hindering of his proper work, and therefore as a thing to be as far as possible trampled under foot and got rid of. Why am I halting here, he would have said, troubled, perplexed, distressed about my wretched self, while all outside God's fields are white unto harvest, and the labourers so few? Let me cast off my fears and my hesitations, and, steadily doing my best through the toil and heat of the day, leave the reward at eventide to God's infinite justice and mercy. "He saved others, himself he cannot save," said the chief priests and the

scribes mocking, as Christ hung in torture upon the cross, and knew not that they were uttering the great law of human salvation. No true man ever tries to save himself: if he can save another, it is enough for him. To accomplish that, he would, were it possible, lose himself: as Paul wished that, for the sake of his brethren according to the flesh, he might be accursed for Christ. Only, in the providence of God, it is not possible: whoso can forget himself, is evermore safe in the arms of eternal and omnipotent Love.

Most of God's gifts to men (all, I dare not say) are ambiguous, and it rests with ourselves whether they shall be bane or blessing. And the sharp dividing-line is drawn at this point—can we, and will we, share them with others? There is health, surely an unmixed good, the physical root of all strength and happiness, the blessing which, more than any other, enters into the whole warp and woof of existence. Is, then, a thoroughly, frankly selfish health a good thing: a health which can afford to disregard all moral checks and signals of danger: a health which is brutal towards suffering and infirmity, simply because it cannot understand them: a health which pursues its vigorous way without a thought of the weakness which it elbows aside, and the sorrow which it tramples under foot? Great bodily, no less than great mental capacities only become sweet and safe by consecration to unselfish uses; and your giant first learns the true

application of his strength when he takes the child Christ upon his shoulders—and in him all weakness—to bear it through the raging torrent of life. Money? —the moral is absolutely too trite to draw: nothing on earth festers into foul corruption so surely as an unused heap of gold. The knowledge which a man accumulates simply in the gratification of his own instincts, and which he neither seeks to share with others nor to turn to practical account, avenges itself by taking possession of him wholly, and making him, instead of a man with human affections and emotions, a poor blinking bookworm, living in the dark and feeding upon perpetual paper. But knowledge rarely is, and art can never be, the treasure which a single soul hugs to itself and gloats over in solitude: their spirit is essentially one of expansion and communion: what new thing any man discovers, he calls the whole world to share with him, and "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever" and to all. Whatever good thing a man keeps to himself, stands neither him nor the world in much stead: all true riches grow by division: and he who spends much, has more. The funeral pyre at Athens is forgotten because its courage and its constancy had none but a personal reference: the cross on Calvary still and for ever draws the eyes of men and thrills their hearts, for there an all-daring love sacrificed itself and was content.

IV.

The Ointment of Spikenard very precious.

MARK xiv. 3:

"And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head."

I WILL not trouble you to-day with any disquisition upon the forms which this story assumes in the three Gospels which contain it, or ask whether it is the same story as that which is told in the seventh chapter of Luke. For my present purpose we only take it as it stands here. It comes to us from the old days with a charming freshness and life-likeness: it is full of the odour of the East, and yet it might have been invented as a parable of modern utilitarianism. Whether the "woman" was Mary—as John has it—brimming over with joy and thankfulness for the restoration of her brother; whether we are to identify her with the "sinner" who is the heroine of Luke's tale—she was in a mood of mind which bade her devise and

adopt the costliest and the most signal method of showing her love and gratitude to Jesus. And of course the spikenard might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor—an application of the money as to which, in those days, no one would have had either moral or economical doubts. From one point of view, it was little better than sheer waste to pour it out on head and feet of one who was profoundly indifferent to such luxurious appliances. Certain calculations might well pass quickly through bystanders' minds as to how many loaves of bread were the equivalent of that moment's extravagance, or how many widows' hearts might be made to sing for joy had it been foregone. I am on the side of the extravagance myself—and so was Christ; but the peculiarity of the case is, that the side which any one takes depends largely on his natural disposition and general way of looking at things: that some of us need no argument to justify this woman in our own hearts, and that to the rest of us no argument will ever justify her. Let self-sacrificing love have free course and be glorified, say some: Nay, say the others, let us have no leaping in the dark, but a careful calculation and balance of consequence, and a regulation of action in accord with that. What motive, high or low, what impulse from the better or baser part of my nature, bids me do it? ask these: What will come of it if I do? is the careful question of those. And each point

of view seems to be right and reasonable until we place ourselves at the other.

I am not going to enter into any disquisition as to the precise meaning and compass of the word utility. The calculation of consequences may be on the narrowest or the widest scale: we may unblushingly confine it to the forces of our own personal pleasure or advantage, or extend it to mean the greatest happiness of the greatest number. And again, we may admit that the right action is always useful also, taking the word useful in its best sense, without admitting that its rightness consists in its usefulness, or that the only way to test its rightness is to determine its utility. But it is very curious and instructive to note how the best and noblest-minded defenders of utilitarianism have felt compelled by a kind of inner necessity so to define it and to fence it with conditions—yes, we might almost say, so to explain it away—as to make it resemble the opposite doctrine as much as possible. For about all avowedly utilitarian morals there is an element of prose, which, except to eminently prosaic minds, is apt to be unsatisfactory sometimes. Such goodness is very calm, very reasonable, very steady: for what it is, you can always rely upon it implicitly: its decisions are not very open to criticism, its arguments are not easy to answer. But it excites no enthusiasm, it exercises no contagion. Everybody respects it; but to apply to the feeling which it calls

up the word love, would be an abuse of terms. It is incapable of folly; and shall I not venture to say that in all the highest and sweetest goodness there is an element of foolishness? It is shy of self-sacrifice; and self-sacrifice is the mark for which men instinctively look in all that claims to be virtue, and are dissatisfied if they do not find it. Somehow, nice calculation of conduct is felt to be inconsistent with the highest achievement: if you would stir men's hearts as with the sound of a trumpet, it must be by the proclamation of duty as duty, "clear of consequence."

Put the ideas of utilitarianism and of heroism side by side, and see how little they will agree. A standing difficulty with utilitarian moralists is to make their principle carry them into those highest regions of human feeling and conduct, where nevertheless the common conscience demands that they shall go: it is hard to justify self-sacrifice, and especially to the extent of self-immolation in the cause of country or of kindness. Love, indeed, every day bids men and women throw away their lives, and asks no justification or indemnity; but that is quite another matter. Sometimes theorists, as I have already said, so manipulate their favourite principle of utility as virtually to change it into the very opposite of itself; others I have known to meet the difficulty in a far less satisfactory way, by denying that self-sacrifice can ever be right. That heresy, I think, may be safely left to the general judg-

ment of mankind; and when a philosopher, as Mr. Herbert Spencer, in his "Data of Ethics," lays it down that nothing can be right which would in any way abridge the actor's life, and implies that a mother is departing from the path of duty when she nurses her sick child to the detriment of her own health, the judgment passed upon him will probably be that, whatever the extent of his other knowledge, he has still to learn the meaning of the word "Ethics." For by an universal instinct of mankind, all morals are felt to grow up into heroism, and culminate in it: we distrust the morality out of which we are sure that no heroism could by possibility grow. We measure the lower by its capacity of producing the higher: we reject a mode of moral thought which implicitly excludes Christ. I do not deny that Christ's toil and disappointment and sufferings and death were in the end the best thing for mankind: I think it possible that in some moment of exalted faith and far-reaching insight he may have seen that it was so. What I deny is, that such a conclusion, which I take to be of the purely intellectual kind, could have transformed itself into his prevailing motive, or infused into him the strength necessary for his self-devotion. Only pure ignorance of human nature—or, on the other hand, blind allegiance to a philosophical theory—could ever persuade any one so. We are moved to great deeds, or nerved to long endurance, only by two things, love

and duty. It is our passions—and our noblest passions the most strongly—that carry us away and give us a strength and a courage not our own. I think of Christ as, throughout his too brief ministry, absolutely faithful to the convictions in which he had begun it: encountering unexpected difficulties, suffering unlooked-for disappointments, seeing his work open before him in ways of which he had not thought—yet holding on: seeing the horizon gradually darken around him, finding himself and his mission involved in a mist of uncertainty—yet holding on: at last aware that the sacrifice of life itself could not honourably be avoided, and that he must leave the task which God had committed to his charge, to hands of which he best knew the feebleness—yet still holding on, through the Agony and to the Cross, in the unshaken assurance that fidelity in word and act was, come what would, the only thing possible for him. But that reading of a great life and death is not consistent with the theory which makes duty a calculation of utilities, and seeks to prove a sacrifice expedient before you can pronounce it right.

The fact is, that any complete calculation of consequences is a thing quite impossible to us. Nothing is more certain than that, on the one hand, a man's action, so to speak, goes out from him to live an independent life, which he can neither trace nor control, and that, on the other, it is connected by a

thousand ramifications of cause and effect with other actors and other actions to the end of time. Physicists have reached the grand generalization that the slightest change in any particle of matter affects in its degree the whole universe for all subsequent time; that, for instance, the winds and rains which sweep over us from the Atlantic now, were implicitly contained, in a given degree, in the unrecorded weather of a thousand years ago. So our self-indulgence or our self-denial, our idleness or our industry, our wrath or our patience, once they have taken shape in act, go on, as it were, modifying others' acts and others' characters, and introducing a fresh and individual element into the equilibrium of the moral world. But nothing is less true than that we can predict what the precise consequences of our actions will be, or gather them all into one sum, of which we can say that it is good or bad. The effects of our worst or our best actions vary, and sometimes even change their character, in accordance with the natures upon which they work: we have known a mother's unbounded self-sacrifice make her children selfish, and a violent temper run to such excesses of rage as to teach in the most effectual way the lesson of self-control. The very Gospel, as Paul keenly discerned, is not only a "savour of life unto life," but of "death unto death;" and the spiritual nourishment on which Peter and James and John grew in strength and grace, was poison to the

unhappy soul of Judas. No; the consequence of our actions is precisely that of which we can never be sure, and which we must leave in the hands of God: the one thing which we can know is the inner source from which they spring. And here there need be no mistake. To have honestly tried to do right is, for all purposes that we need care about, to have done it. And from the Christian point of view there is always safety in self-spending.

I know the reply which some of you are already secretly making to me in your own hearts. You are protesting against extravagances of toil, against fanaticisms of generosity, against follies of self-devotion, which refuse to calculate any proportion or adaptation of means to ends, and so have no other result than that of moral waste. I would not, however, be too sure even of that: a great faith is never wasted, even though you cannot discern its achievement: an unconscious, a self-forgetful display of human nobleness has in it at least this, that it helps men to be nobler. There is contagion in heroic goodness; but I never heard that there was anything of the kind about even the most consummate prudence. But recollect that all preaching which is not pedantic, and aiming after a philosophical completeness which does not belong to it, must be one-sided; and then ask to which bias it were expedient that I should give myself. Do we any of us need to be exhorted to a nice calcu-

lation of the results of our actions? Do we not all pride ourselves upon wary walking? Foolish we may be; but are our follies too often the follies of goodness? Do we wear ourselves out in unselfish labour, or put a too implicit trust in human nature, or believe with an overweening faith in the kingdom of God? Do we need to be warned against a too exclusive absorption in the things that make for the general good, or to be reminded of nearer interests and our private welfare? I am inclined to think that even when we are minded to do good, we usually set about it in too humdrum, too prosaic, too utilitarian a way: we should look askance at an apostle if he could not make his accounts balance: and we call him rather fool than saint who pours out his strength and his life like water whenever the vineyard of God is athirst. And yet, as far as the experience of my own life goes, these are the men who have accomplished something. Often it happens that their enterprizes do not succeed, but the memory and the charm of their character remain. Faith is a stronger thing than committees, and one man's self-forgetfulness than the collective wisdom of many councillors. Whoever has known such men is the better for it. The recollection of what they were rebukes cowardice and unfaithfulness and self-indulgence, and makes life nobler than it would have been had they not lived.

Our story brings into the strongest contrast use

and sentiment, and we feel that between them is a real opposition. But is there any such opposition between the right and the sentimental, or do we not acknowledge that many of our best feelings, many of our noblest affections, are closely allied to the sentimental, and must accept whatever opprobrium is bound up in that word? There is utility in a wife: she keeps one's house, she attends to one's comforts, she stands between one and a thousand petty necessities of life: you can look at her from this point of view until you discern her as the most trusted, the most useful, the most necessary, of upper servants. And I can imagine a time when her kind and watchful usefulness shall be utterly at an end, or shall have given place to a sad dependence: when she is compelled to ask from others that constant service which she was once so prompt to render: when she is nothing more than the wreck of her former self, a mournful memory of a bright and beautiful activity,—and yet when she shall call out from any not ignoble spirit a tenderness, a loving care, a gratitude that keeps heart and hand ever on the alert, a loyal homage, a submissive allegiance, which, if not better things than the love of youth, are at least freer from the alloy of self. It is an old story that men do foolish things when they are in love, and smile at themselves when in after years love has grown cold; but they are the better for having done them, and their criticism is on

a lower level than their folly was. We are made thus: we cannot help it, and we would not help it if we could. Things are signs to us, containing more than their apparent meaning: a flag stands for loyalty; a lock of hair, for a lost love; an old letter, for a friend estranged; a chance word calls up a world of forgotten emotions; bread and wine are no longer themselves, but a sacrament, Christ's body and Christ's blood. And under the influence of thoughts and memories which these things suggest, we do not closely measure our words, or ask what our actions, rigidly interpreted, may be taken to mean. For a little while we are above criticism, and content to be so. If it were the woman that had been a sinner who brake the box of ointment, very precious, on the head of the Master, she did it because she thought no sacrifice too costly to express in the feeblest and most partial fashion her love for one whose pure goodness had shown her the way back to womanhood. Christ, as he sat at the Pharisee's feast, stood to her for self-respect, and the quieting of remorse, and God's smile again lighting up her life, and the hope of unstained years to come. But to the bystanders he was only a wandering prophet from Galilee, whom they wanted to look at for the strange things that he said and did, and they naturally murmured at the fraud practised on the poor.

Of one thing we may be sure, that we cannot regu-

late the utilities of the universe. We see into its complexities only a very little way, and understand only a small part of what we see. I believe that they are regulated for us much better than we could do it for ourselves, and that the true sphere of our activity lies in quite another direction. What we have to do is, not so much to attempt to play the part of a controlling providence outside of our own life, as to keep sweet within the fountains of pure sympathy, and just to let them flow. If we love goodness, our actions will naturally, and quite infallibly, range themselves on the side of goodness. Then happy is it for us if we possess, in addition, the rare faculty of discerning a true King of men, and acknowledging that for us there can be no better thing than to pour out all the riches of our heart upon him. The days of "the alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious," are for the most part gone: what is asked of us now is self-surrender, strong enthusiasm, untiring patience, faithfulness even unto death. We give them, it may be, and the world murmurs at the waste: fidelity to a hopeless cause: a foolish extravagance of strength: a needless sacrifice of happiness. But the Master's word is, "He hath done what he could"—and whosoever hears it, needs no more.

V.

The Race that is set before us.

HEBREWS xii. 1:

"Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

THE authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews is one of the unsolved and insoluble problems of New Testament literature. The common hypothesis now, that it is the work of Paul, was precisely that which the literary sense of the first centuries forbade them to entertain: by them its apostolic authorship was long held to be doubtful, and it was one of the last books to find an unquestioned place in the Canon. Some said Apollos was its author; some, Barnabas: till at last the desire to annex a great name to what is really an anonymous book, fathered it upon Paul. Internally, it does not suggest itself as his: the style, the mode of thought, the line of treat-

ment, are different: all other books ascribed to him, authentic and unauthentic, are duly signed by his name. Besides, there is one passage (ii. 3) which, as Luther saw long ago, conclusively proves that the author of the Epistle belonged to the generation after the apostolic: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" So, beyond the negative conclusions to which we are thus led, we may give up the question in despair. We may connect the book, with equal probability and equal lack of evidence, with any of the great names of the early Christian ages. There is nothing to induce us to give the preference to any.

I will not pause upon the general character of the book. It is an attempt—as indeed is indicated by the title which it usually bears—to recommend Christianity to those who still clung to the old ritual; and, if the whole truth is to be spoken, is as unsuccessful as such attempts to pour new wine into old bottles commonly are. The apologist is caught in the meshes of his own allegory; and we have an adaptation of Christian facts to Jewish forms, in which Christ appears, now as the sacrificing priest, now as the victim offered up. Of course the Epistle, especially if taken piecemeal, as Protestant expositors are wont to take Scripture, affords much support to the sacrificial theory of Christ's death; and in one passage, "without shed-

ding of blood there is no remission," gives countenance to some of the coarsest and most repulsive exaggerations of modern Evangelical theology. But its author was happily capable of better things than the laboured allegory which fills so many of his pages. I, for one, cannot doubt that he was a Jew who, though full of the new faith, saw how it had grown out of the old, and was profoundly unwilling to let go the fine spiritual traditions which were the glory and the life of Israel. This faith, this reaching forth of the soul to things unseen and unproved, without which it is impossible to please God, is no new thing, no fresh aspiration of humanity, no gift for the first time brought down from heaven to earth by Christ. It was the light in which the Fathers dwelt: it was the strength in which Moses had liberated the people: it was the inspiration of heroes, prophets, martyrs, more than tongue could tell. But a shadowy light, it is true; only a chequered strength; an inspiration that looked forward to something better and completer than itself. But the same breath of the Lord was upon all the ages, strengthening and purifying and making them one. And the end of all is, the responsibility of the fuller light, the inspiration of God's great day. "Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

In these words there is to me, to-day, a sound as of a trumpet-call. Their effect, like that of every other deep and pregnant phrase, varies with the mood of the recipient mind: we read them sometimes, and they are little more than a succession of familiar sounds falling upon the ear, hardly touching even the brain; and then again, as if a fresh electric current were passing through them, they quicken the pulse, and stir the heart, and fire the conscience. And what do they now seem to mean? First, there is the cloud of witnesses. No doubt the writer had in his mind one of those solemn athletic contests in which the Greeks delighted, which were closely associated with the forms of popular religion, and to which their theories of physical education gave a great practical importance. There was the wide course stretching far beneath the unclouded sky, adorned with statues of famous victors of old, stately with the temples of the immortal gods, and, all around, the people come together from many a city far and near, to watch the efforts of their own youths, and to cheer them as, with muscles strained and labouring chests, they flew towards the goal. So, if our life be a race, it is not without its attendant and sympathizing witnesses. I do not mean the living: they are struggling in the arena at our side: they share our hopes and fears, and are involved in our fate. It is those who have toiled in the race, and reached the goal: who have known every quick alter-

nation of hope and despondency and despair: who have felt at one moment as if they could not bear up an instant longer, and at the next were full of a strange celestial strength: and who, now at last at rest from their labours, free for ever from their fears, know in whom they have believed, acknowledge in whose strength they have conquered. And upon us they look down with eyes of serene encouragement, bidding us remember that a crown of life remains for them that endure unto the end.

Yes, reply the faithful lips, we see them, but do they see us? The way by which the race has travelled is illumined by many shining stars: we come of a noble lineage: we have inherited great wealth of goodness. If we lived more habitually with the best men and their best thoughts, our lives could not so easily drop to the level of the selfish and the commonplace: we should feel far more than we do how it is an obligation upon those who stand in a noble line, to be noble. But have not the heroes and the saints, the martyrs and the prophets, the men and women who stood near to God, and upon whose faces the light of His glory was reflected, so that weaker eyes could see it—have they not gone to their reward? Have they not passed out of sight and hearing of our poor earthly efforts, to be employed by God in the ampler ministries of heaven? I cannot tell: these are the mysteries of faith, into which the keenest eye can see only a little

way. But if I take counsel of my own heart, it would seem to me, unless the gift of eternal life wake a complete change in my nature, a quite impossible thing ever to become indifferent—no matter how many ages may roll away, no matter what progress I may make in Divine service—to the toils and sorrows of my race, as here upon earth it slowly lifts itself a little nearer to the kingdom of God. And so I cannot but think that the immortal ones never lose sight of us. Ours is not a lonely race, a solitary struggle. "A cloud of witnesses around, holds us in full survey." Our toils and stumblings, our faintings and discouragements, are theirs too: they mourn over our failures, they rejoice in our success.

"Laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us." The last phrase is one which, by its singular force and aptness, has made itself a fixed place in our religious language: we speak of "the besetting sin" as that which lies nearest to every one of us, and is promptest and subtlest of assault. I think that the one Greek word which is the equivalent of "which doth so easily beset us," is rightly translated, though it occurs nowhere else in the whole compass of the language. Other proposed renderings seem to me to be at once less justified by the etymology, and far inferior in religious force and application. But I am persuaded that we should make a mistake in treating the reference as to any special sin in each

individual case. No doubt there are besetting sins which call for peculiar vigilance, and each man knows his own. There are points, so to speak, in each individual life in which the horizon is clear, and again points from which an attack may be momentarily expected, and it would be folly indeed not to keep the sharpest watch where the danger is most imminent. But I think it is an universal experience that the moral foes with which we have to deal are singularly active and subtle: that on no side are we safe: and that at the very moment at which we may be keeping watch and ward against some temptation of which we know and fear the strength, an attack from a side quite unlooked for may leave us helpless and ashamed. And I take the meaning of the phrase which we are discussing to be, that sin, not in the special but in the general sense, always besets us: that in the present state of being we are subject to a thousand temptations, vulnerable at a thousand points: and that if we are to run the race that is set before us with any chance of success, it must be in the strength of a single-minded striving after holiness.

But there is more in it than this. What of the "every weight" of which the athlete naturally disencumbers himself? It is not sin, from which it is distinguished, and yet, like sin, it is to be resolutely laid aside. The interpretation is not difficult. If there be any way of life which, innocent according to a worldly standard

and as tried by the common custom of men, is yet inconsistent with the highest requirements of duty, or felt to bring with it peculiar temptations, it is to be renounced. If there be any habit which, defensible in itself, carries with it a possibility of sullying the pure lustre of a Christian profession, or troubles the quiet depths of conscience, or even involves misunderstanding and offence in others, it is to be cast off. If there be worldly interests or worldly affections which so completely occupy the heart as to cool its love of God and slacken the ardour of its aspiration after the one true end of life, they must be laid aside or reduced to that place of subordination which is their due. He who contends for the prize of swiftness and endurance carries no needless burthens. And yet, in so saying, I would not be supposed to advocate any ascetic and unearthly holiness, or to inculcate that whoever would run the Christian race must hold himself separate from the world. To every man's conscience must be left the task of interfusing life with a high moral purpose which shall animate and govern the whole—a test here, an inspiration there, but everywhere first, last, best. To live nobly is the chief thing: if only we knew how much the chiefest of all, all ignobleness would drop away out of our lives of itself.

There is yet another phrase on which I am tempted to delay for a moment—"with patience." We are wont to complain that life is short; and indeed, as we

look back upon it from near its close, years seem but months, and months dwindle into days. But much patience goes to the making of seventy years sweet, strong, consistent, holy. One of the unexpected experiences which comes with advancing years is, I think, that of the changefulness of life. When we are young, we think that we can predict it all: but when they come, our middle years are not what we thought they would be, and age creeps on, mingling youth with it in a fashion for which we are not prepared. All the sharper crises, all the deeper experiences of life, have an unexpected element in them: and there are long and arid tracts of existence to be traversed, of which the fresh energies, the bounding impulses of youth, give no warning. And strange as the assertion may at first seem to be, I do not think that it is our sharpest agonies which most put our patience to the proof. God is good to His own when they are in trouble: and they that find Him, though naked of all else, feel no need. It is the monotony of life that tries us: the sense of bounded opportunities and bounded powers: the slackness of interest that comes of constantly performing the same duties in the same way: the growing stiffness of faculty: the feeling of dissatisfaction with ourselves, and yet the impossibility of being other than ourselves. And so the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does well to interpose that warning note, "with patience," in the stirring harmony

of his exhortation. Not in one short, sharp burst of effort is the race to be run. To the succour of the swift limb must come the stout heart and the resolute will. Often he struggles best who struggles longest, and the slowest foot may soonest reach the goal.

To-day, which to you is only one in the ordinary succession of Sundays, is to me one of the most solemn of the year, for it is that on which, with powers once more re-invigorated by rest, I begin my work afresh. And so you will easily understand how much of my exhortation has been directed to my own heart. I own the inspiring presence of the cloud of witnesses: I would, with God's help, lay aside every weight, and the so easily besetting sin; with patience I would run the race that is set before me, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith. But though there be seasons of the Christian year which make an equal appeal to all hearts, and again crises of the individual spirit with which no man can meddle, is it not also true that every moment may, under the quickening inspiration of God, be a point of new spiritual departure? What but this is the meaning of that perpetual divine ministry, in which God is always trying to find His way to His children's souls? What but this the significance of that preaching of the Word, in which it is my duty and my privilege to persevere? All other functions of the pulpit are subordinate to the one chief end of touching hearts: of sending through consciences

an awakening thrill: of winning an irresolute will to the side of righteousness: of raising in common existences a fresh sense of the dignity of life. And so, brethren and sisters, the Lord be with us to-day! May He give us all a new insight into what we are, and what, by His help, we may be! May He call to our recollection all the bright and beautiful and strong souls that have gone before and still look down upon us, and make us feel that we are of the household of God and the fellowship of saints! May He help us to lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and, not in the quickly fading strength of a brief enthusiasm, but with courage and patience, run the race that is set before us! Then He, who has inspired the strength and sustained the endurance, will not fail to give the crown.

VI.

Strange Fire.

LEVITICUS x. 1—3:

"And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord. Then Moses said unto Aaron, This is it that the Lord spake, saying, I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace."

I WILL begin by frankly confessing that I do not know how to re-translate this legend into sober, credible history. Something lies at the back of it, but whether a substratum of actual fact, or the unconscious desire to account for a peculiarity of ritual, or a mythical explanation of some anomaly in the Aaronic family history, I cannot tell. The more we penetrate into the secret places of primeval history, the more do we find causes of this kind at work in the

production of those vivid and picturesque narratives which were once accepted as exact transcripts of an earlier world. The results of such criticism are often, I admit, disenchanting. It is hard to find fading away into the dim and distant mists of the past, scenes and figures which had laid a powerful hold upon our childish imagination, and to have to substitute for a region in which living men moved and spoke, one peopled by unsubstantial ghosts. There was a widespread and not unnatural feeling of resentment when Bishop Colenso applied his hard-and-fast arithmetical tests to the Pentateuch narratives: and only a few devoted lovers of truth, everywhere and under all circumstances, have welcomed the attempt to show that the mythological instincts of mankind have been active upon this as upon other fields. And yet perhaps even the imagination gains more than it loses by this procedure. For the first time we are able to feel that we have a real past behind us. We can re-construct the history of the human mind. We can penetrate to the birth and watch the growth of religious instincts and emotions. And if the picture of the primeval world thus becomes a parable rather than a narrative, it is a parable full of beauty and of meaning.

As a parable, then, I take the story of the text. It condenses into a living form the eternal contention between the priest and the prophet, the orthodox

doctor and the heresiarch. Both assume to bring fire before the Lord: each claims to be able to present an acceptable offering. But when the priest angrily and contemptuously declares the censer of his brother to smoke with "strange fire," he thinks that he has uttered a sufficient word of condemnation. And, on the other hand, the contention of the heretic is, that any fire which burns up the impure and the unclean must flame acceptably before a pure and holy God.

The old chemists, with their doctrine of the four elements of which all things were composed—earth, air, water and fire—ascribed, we are told, to the last a peculiar character of purity. Fire does not present itself to the imagination as susceptible of adulteration. It puts on no variety of outward aspect: wherever or however it manifests itself, it is one and the same. For ever dying out and perpetually renewed, it has even a character of individuality: there are not many fires, but one: an early and coveted secret of savage life is to be able to call forth at will, and yet to keep within bounds, a beneficent, which at any moment may reveal itself as a destroying, force. Add to this its power of utterly annihilating whatever is of coarser and less ethereal nature than itself, and you have reasons enough why fire should enter, in very varied shapes, into religious ritual. There was the altar of Burnt-offering in the Temple of the Hebrews, which recalls, in a shape hardly different, the sacrificial feasts

which the Homeric heroes prepared and enjoyed on the sea-shore before windy Troy. There was the perpetual flame on the Roman altar, which it was the business of the vestal virgins to keep alight, and whose extinction meant the ruin of the city. There are the votive candles which play so large a part in Roman Catholic worship: the dim lamps, ever lighted, which hang before the holiest shrines: the candlesticks, the empty remnants of a worn-out superstition, which find a legal place—so long as they give no light—on Anglican altars. And, last of all, there are the censers, which fill the air of the church with that faint, stifling smell of incense, which seems to be to some spirits the very breath of worship, the air in which God dwells. But all these, it appears to me, are but pale and feeble symbolic fancies, compared with that ancient Persian cult which boldly takes Fire, the beneficent, the destroying, the immaterial, the pure, the immortal, as the fittest presentment of Deity, and bows in grateful and yet awe-stricken reverence before the all-quickening orb which flames upon the noon-day heavens.

But it is necessary, for the sake of my parable, to connect fire with religion in yet another sense. We cannot describe religion without using metaphors drawn from this source. The ardour of faith, the heat of love, the flame of a righteous indignation, are phrases which rise, not only naturally but necessarily, to our lips whenever we are dealing with the phenomena of

religious passion. Said Christ himself, in the first fresh enthusiasm of his ministry, when his word had free course and all went well with him, and he beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven: "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." So, without forgetting the quieter moods of peace and trust and resignation which also have their place in the Christian life, it is undeniably true that we accomplish most of what is good for God and man and ourselves in seasons of enthusiasm and passion. I have dwelt upon this before, and I need not delay upon the thought now. And I know, too, that there is unholy as well as holy fire: that passion takes every form, from the brightest to the basest: that rage will kindle as well as love, and sensual lust burn to whitest heat, no less than self-denying affection. But "strange" is not necessarily "unholy" fire, as the priests would have us believe. Not the censer in which it is offered, but the brightness with which it burns, makes it acceptable to God. The true fire in human hearts is always kindled from the altar that burns day and night before the Lord in heaven, and finds its way back to its heavenly source as by a kind of supernal attraction. But flames lighted on earth, though offered to heaven by every exquisite device of worship, on earth wane and flicker and expire.

Strange fire! Is there, then, more than one awe of the Supreme? Is not all passionate love of righteous-

ness a single impulse? Can any just distinction be drawn between self-forgetting love in East and West, now and three thousand years ago? When we read wonderful and beautiful tales of self-sacrifice in the life of the Buddha—call them legend, myth or sober history, as you will—are they less true to the inmost spiritual reality of human nature than the story of the Christ? When the Greek patriot throws away his life for his country, believing that this life is all, shall we rank him below the Christian martyr, who sees the angels stooping down upon his funeral pyre, and in their hands an unfading crown? Suppose some savage mother, in whose heart burn only untaught instincts of love and faithfulness, true to her child even unto death—shall not her self-immolation stand equal, in the sight of God and man, with hers who, not more, not less faithful, lives in the inmost cell of church fellowship? Ay, but it will be said, these know not God: they are outside the scope of sacramental blessing: they have not appropriated the benefits of Christ's atonement. We hardly know through what strange regions of speculation the Buddha wandered ere he found the Nirvana that he sought. How purely human in passion, in caprice, in lust, were those gods and goddesses to whom Hellas reared such stately shrines, whom she perpetuated in such consummate and undying beauty! And that savage mother, whose touching faithfulness was yet so blind, did she not bow down

before stocks and stones, the rude fetishes of a terror-stricken superstition? It is all true from the human point of view; but what if we look upon it from heaven? I seem to see the One God, who, dwelling in light inaccessible and full of glory, is altogether beyond and above our thought, who may be other and must be better than we conceive Him, looking down upon this poor earth from its beginning, as He looks down upon a thousand other worlds infinitely brighter and more beautiful. He is the only reality: and all human gods mere shadows of hope and fear, of awe and expectation, painted upon the changeful clouds. Does any sincere prayer break from men's lips? It finds His eternal ear. Does any true heart pour itself forth in love? It enters into fellowship with Him. Is the fire of genuine charity kindled anywhere? It burns with the light of those eternal flames in which is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

And yet all down the Christian ages I seem to hear the cry of contempt and condemnation, "Strange fire!" It was raised at the very beginning: the Twelve could not comprehend the erratic brother who, once a persecutor of the Church, would only serve it after a fashion of his own, and to the last went on his way mistrusted, perhaps mistrusting. The reconciling and moderating mind to which we owe the "Acts of the Apostles" assures us that these differences were all smoothed away in a formal contract; but the rift may

easily be traced under the surface of the apostolic age, and in one form or another has lasted down to our own time. Presently, as the idea of orthodoxy took shape and consistence, that of heresy grew into form over against it: Christians forgot the time, not yet distant, at which Christianity itself had been but "strange fire:" and men never stayed to inquire whether the incense which was offered to God was pure and good, in their anxiety as to the shape of the censer in which it burned. When Luther disinterred the Pauline Gospel, and preached faith for works Christ for the Church, the living soul for sacraments, the Bible for the Fathers and the Schoolmen, what a cry went up from the men who held the belief of Europe in their hands, that this new fire of faith was only a destroying flame, lighted from the very pit of hell, and greedy to burn up all that was holy and good! "Strange fire!" was the Reformers' word to Zwinglian and Anabaptist, to Servetus and Socinus: it taught them nothing that the reproach which they directed against their own heretics, Catholics hurled at them. "Strange fire!" said all England to George Fox, as, clad in his suit of leather, he wandered from shire to shire, fanning the half-extinct embers of spiritual life; and again to Wesley, as, under the magic of his appeal, the tears made furrows down the cheeks of the colliers of Kingswood. "Strange fire!" was, sad to confess, what the Unitarian ministers of Boston

said to Theodore Parker, when he tried to deliver in their hearing the message which God, he thought, had put upon his lips: he believed in law, not in miracle: what, then, did it matter that his heart was all aflame with enthusiasm for humanity, and molten with the love of God? And all around me I hear the same cry still—bandied about between Catholics and Protestants, between Churchmen and Dissenters, between those who believe little and those who believe less—until presently another fire begins to burn, which, whether strange or not, is at least unholy, destroying fellowship and parching love.

Fire of some sort, I have said, there must needs be. A religion that kindled none, that never made the heart throb faster, or gave a fresh energy to the will, or inspired a new tenderness into the conscience, or set the affections aglow—a religion that allowed life to jog on contentedly in old ruts of habit, never awakening dissatisfaction with what is, never revealing the brighter world that may be—would hardly be worthy of the name. And it is by this test that all heresies and all heresiarchs must ultimately be tried. Nothing is more difficult than to bring them to the standard of abstract truth. What is truth? asked Pilate, not jesting, as I think, but in a mood of truly human sadness; nor is it in its least wise moments that humanity repeats the question, and, like the Roman procurator, does not attempt to answer it.

Something indeed we know—enough to live, enough to die by: truths that have an energy of inspiration in them, truths that reveal the possibility and teach us the method of growth. But these creeds descending from the childhood of our present civilization: these church systems abundantly deformed by the rust and moss of the middle ages: these "bodies of divinity," which are little more than the ridges of sand heaped up by the great living wave of the Reformation: these confident assertions as to God and spiritual things, in which phrases are made to do duty for facts, and the counters of theological debate to pass current for sterling coin of faith,—do not seem to me to be so rooted in the nature of things, so to rest upon an immovable foundation, as to supply the standard by which the truth of new opinions can be tried. If philosophy and natural science are teaching this age anything, it is that divine names have more meaning in them than we can grasp, that divine realities are too many-sided for our apprehension. We are learning, too, that we are largely the intellectual creatures of our time: that by one generation after another, truth is being slowly beaten out: that we know more than our fathers, that our children will know more than we. A new theory in chemistry I try by its accordance with acknowledged truth, by the evidence of fact which it can show, by its own inherent probability. But when I hear of a new movement in religion, I have another

and a quite different series of questions to ask. Does it kindle the fire of love? Does it refine, strengthen, sweeten the life? Does it run through society with a cleansing flame, burning up the mean, the base, the selfish, the impure? It is no heresy if it stands this test. There is but one church of the children of God, and unfaithfulness is the only infidelity.

And observe, in the last place, that this is a test which will apply and which is unerring. Men are beginning to try it everywhere with singular boldness, sometimes with unexpected results. Protestants have been wont to assume, without much inquiry, the justifiableness of that great movement which we call the Reformation: to believe that it was in the direction of truth, and away from superstition: in the direction of simplicity, and away from corruption: in the direction of liberty, and away from enslavement: in the direction of holiness, and away from immorality. I think that the more minutely and impartially it is investigated, the more it will turn out to be all this; but the inquiry will have to be conducted on a wider ground than it has hitherto occupied, and it will end by establishing that Catholicism too produced great saints, nurtured sweet souls, cultivated the fruits of the spirit in the garden of human life. On this principle, it may even turn out that a system is true at one stage of its development and false at another: true, as long as it is living, operative, a fire in the individual heart, a

renovating power in society; false, when the life is in it no longer, when its creeds cease to express passionate convictions, when its principles inspire no strength of self-sacrifice, when it retreats upon authority, and falls back upon denunciation. Truth is ours only so long as we can fill it with life. It is better to believe a half-truth with all our heart, than to be in possession of the supreme reality, and bow down before it with careless allegiance, or none. And we have sunk to the lowest when we do not know awe, love, sweetness, patience, self-devotion, when we see them, and accuse of offering "strange fire" those who bring them to the God who in these things lives and moves and has His being.

VII.

Great Cities.

JONAH iv. 11:

"And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?"

WHEN summer comes out upon the land, and days are long and hot, and efficient work is every day harder to do, and weary labourers with brain and hand begin to think with great longing of shady trees, and deep meadows, and tides swinging to and fro upon sandy shores, and cool breezes blowing in from the evening sea,—one is tempted to ask, why should men herd themselves together in great cities? Is it not natural for human beings to feel the touch, as it were, of mother earth: a wholesome and a peaceful thing that they should live in contact with nature, and the natural processes of which, in a sense, their

own life is a part? These stony streets beneath our feet; these long lines of dull houses, which bar the view except in one direction; this destruction of natural beauty, with but the poorest possible compensation from human art; this close contact with men, in which is no companionship; these crowds, which are only the most hateful form of solitude—are at once artificial and unrefreshing: they take us out of our natural environment and give us nothing that can fill its place. And great cities seem to bring to a focus all that is weak and perplexing in our civilization. Nowhere else is wealth so selfishly luxurious: nowhere else is poverty so hopelessly squalid. The rich herd with the rich, the poor with the poor: yet, though side by side, they live apart. The mass and bulk of wretchedness in a great city are an element of perplexity in themselves: one may dream of playing Providence to a village, but who is to lift the East-end of London, the North-end of Liverpool, out of the mire? We do not think of a poor quarter as made up of men and women, of families, having each an individuality of its own—its size appals us, and we come to look upon it as a natural phenomenon, like an earthquake or an inundation, with which it is impossible to deal. We sigh for scattered homesteads, village communities, where life is simple, and human companionship possible, and Nature's voice is always audible by the ear that listens for it. We think it is not wholly a

poetic antithesis to say that God made the country, man the town. At all events, we feel that in great cities it is possible to have too much of human handiwork, and to realize in existence fewer possibilities than God gave it.

And yet, if we are to consult the experience of history, the tendency of men, in any developed stage of civilization, to draw together into great cities seems practically irresistible. Nor is this tendency peculiar to any country or any age. Nineveh and Babylon, Alexandria and Rome, are the precise analogues of London and Liverpool and New York. I have no doubt that if we could penetrate beneath the surface splendours of history to the soberer details that lie below—if, behind the rise and fall of dynasties, the bloodshed of war, the ruin of revolutions, we could see how the people toiled and hungered and died—we should find in every ancient capital the contrasts of wealth and poverty which shock us at home, and the vicious squalor which now daunts our faith in human progress. I do not believe that these evils have grown greater or more obstinate with lapse of time: the chief difference is in the keener apprehension of their peril, the more resolute effort to overcome them. I will not pretend to give an exhaustive enumeration of the causes which build up great cities, or which, when they have reached a certain point of development, seem to bid them grow, as an avalanche gathers mass

by its own weight and velocity. Sometimes a site for a great human settlement, like that of Constantinople, is pointed out by the finger of nature: sometimes a prescient genius, like Alexander, bids a city arise, and it continues to be a centre of trade for more than twenty centuries: sometimes chance points out to a robber horde the opportunity of a hill fortress by a river-side, and Rome becomes the capital of the world. But there comes a time, in the history of every great city, when, independent of any advantage of site, apart from any definite individuality of attraction, it draws men to it, and grows without apparent limit to its greatness. The rich flock to London, to float in the central current of wealth and pleasure and excitement; and the poor lose themselves in its depths, thinking that to their share must fall some crumbs from the full table of its prosperity. Wealth that would make itself richer, poverty that would escape from its own limitations, every ambition that wants a career, the actor asking a stage, the poet a public, the painter an admiring crowd, the politician who is tired of playing the part of a village Hampden, the preacher who disdains a rural audience—and, besides these, thousands more, swayed by what secret attraction they know not, all tend citywards. And in the majority of cases it is only to be lost in the crowd, only to swell a statistical table of population, only to find that the strong man carries the secret of his own life with

him, and is the same upon the solitary heath and in the thickest of the jostling street.

I hold it, then, quite useless to try to stem or turn aside a general tendency of human nature. In a stage of civilization such as that which we have now reached, the country is necessarily depleted in favour of the town; and though there is a reflex current, it is always by comparison weak and intermittent. And I have already by implication given a powerful reason why this should be so. There is an universal conviction—even though sometimes one that can neither understand nor express itself—that life is more vivid in the town than in the country: that more can be got out of existence: that the contacts and exchanges of men are closer, quicker, more lively: that the common life is more completely organized, and movements of thought more rapidly contagious. And all this is the truer in proportion as men are more dependent for intellectual stimulus and provision upon others, and less able to live a solitary, self-centred, meditative life. I can fancy, for example, one who, from some physical peculiarity, did not very keenly feel the joy of energy, and was not compelled by an inner necessity to be up and doing, living an ample and full life in country retirement: coming, in books and newspapers, as much in contact with the outer world as he needed and desired: finding complete and happy occupation for his mind in the succession of the seasons

and the changeful aspects of nature: noting the ways of beast and bird and insect: marking the sweet processions of the flowers, and meditating much and well, as his days went swiftly by, on the riddle of life and the secrets of human fate. But unless there were welling up in such an one a clear, strong spring of intellectual energy, I think he would be very apt to grow dull and indifferent: that his habits would finally rule him, not he his habits: and that he would come to be assimilate at last with the flowers which he cultivated, and the trees under whose shade he rested. And the keenest, strongest souls always, I think, long for the battle of life—desire the contact of their fellowmen, even if hostile—want to be where the crowd is thickest, and thought most agile, and action readiest to the hand. "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay," said the poet, and all vivid spirits accept the word. It is not altogether the ignoble passion for excitement that bids men prefer living to dawdling through life. I think that this motive, in a somewhat different form, is as potent on the lower as on the higher levels of intellectual life. Men all want, not only to live, but to feel that they are living: to be conscious of a strong tide of energy flowing through their veins; or, if that cannot be, at least to float upon a swift current of life, and to feel the impact of vital forces. And so, it may be, the attraction to great cities is strongest in those who have least self-centred

force. The strong man is himself everywhere: the weak and dependent nature first reaches full self-consciousness in a crowd. Here is one who can stand apart in the isolation of an individual opinion; but there are many more who have no opinion till the majority carries them away and they can shout with a multitude. We invest the lot of a cottager who lives far from the throng of men, with an idyllic simplicity and purity: we think almost with envy of the few demands life makes upon him, and the perfectness with which he can perform his daily duties: we imagine existence flowing on for him with peaceful current, as the seasons come in their turn, and manhood declines into old age. But this is our town view of things—our estimate made from a standpoint of hurry and turmoil and over-excitement: what *he* vaguely feels is, that his wants are too few, that his life holds less than it might do, and he fancies a more vivid existence beneath the canopy of smoke that overhangs the great city. The time comes, no doubt, for such an one, whether he succeeds or fails in his attempt, to be disenchanted. Soon to him there will be "a distant dearness in the hill, a secret sweetness in the stream," which were once unacknowledged elements in his daily existence. He will long for the simplicity which he has given up, the rest which he has renounced. But not the less will the fever of human intercourse burn in his veins, and until he is

utterly beaten down and trampled under foot, he will prefer to struggle on in the throng of men.

And as the progress of humanity is largely dependent upon the contacts of men with one another, upon interchanges of thought, and reactions of influence, and contagions of sympathy, great cities play an important part in civilization. You cannot fancy a country divided among village communities, which should occupy a foremost place in science or literature or art, or the application of any of these to the development and perfecting of life. Such a country might be well tilled, and therefore fairly rich: the comforts of life might be evenly spread over its whole surface, and contrasts of wealth and poverty happily absent: it might be far removed from dangers of civic commotion and revolution: it might have reached a political equilibrium, which would not only secure it a long national existence, but leave room and opportunity for the play of all forces of development that were in it. I do not say that this would not be from some points of view a very desirable state of things: it would even approach the social ideal on which we, shocked by the actual state of things amongst us, are beginning to fix our eyes. But I think that life in such a country would move very slowly, and tend on the whole to decline to a lower level. Or if it never sank very low, I doubt if it would ever rise very high: it would have much comfort and little heroism: and if any lightning

flashes of genius shot across it, few would understand or care for them. All this, of course, is only relatively true, and liable to be crossed by exceptions. But it is impossible for the student of history not to see the prevailing influence of great cities in all that makes for human progress, and the attraction which they have always exercised on the master spirits of the race. The men whose thoughts burn, whose words live, whose achievement has a permanent quality, are often nurtured in the country, often return to the country to rest awhile and die, but they do not spend their days there.

At first sight, it would seem as if this were less true of religion than of anything else. The Spirit knows no limitations of time or place; and, in especial, there are moments at which, to a devout soul, Nature becomes the very presence-chamber of God. We think of Abraham in his tent-door at nightfall, with the infinite sky overhead, and the great desert spaces round about: of Moses keeping sheep in Midian: of Amos, who was a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit: of Christ in the Galilean village: of John Baptist in the wilderness beyond Jordan: of Mahomet, tending the camels of Khadijah: of mediæval saints innumerable, in rude hermitage and remote cloister: of Tyndale meditating among the Gloucestershire fields, and Fox wandering from one midland hamlet to another. Yes, there is a sense in which great souls are nearest to God when vexed and lowered by no

human companionship: moments at which the awe of Divine Presence so takes possession of them, as to leave no room for any meaner experience. But then there is another stage in the history of religious movements at which the prophet, the reformer, the preacher, necessarily seeks his fellow-men, and finds them out where they are thickest—there delivering his message, and committing it, as it were, to the contagion of sympathy and enthusiasm. What a part in the history of thought has been played by Jerusalem and Athens, by Alexandria and Antioch, by Rome and Constantinople! There is no more significant fact in the first history of Christianity than that the word pagan simply means villager—showing that while the cities led the way in the reception of the new faith, the country lagged stolidly behind. So still, I suppose, our hope for vivid theological thought, for fresh religious life, for a solution of difficulties, for a new breath of inspiration, lies chiefly in the towns. There, the evils of our social state are the most appalling; but there, too, the tide of heroic self-devotion rises highest. I have often spoken of the religious charm of natural beauty and solitude; and how the mountains that stand fast for ever, the sea with its endless murmur and moan, the sky gorgeous with all the splendours of sunset, or even the humblest flower, in which lie thoughts too deep for tears, may fill the soul with God. And it is easy to lose sight of Him in the town—not

merely in the press of worldly work, the seduction of meaner interests eating out our own strength, but in the feeling of a misery which it is hard to reconcile with a belief in His goodness, and a vice that stamps upon humanity the brand of failure. And yet to a faith which, happily, these things cannot daunt, is it possible that He should be far off, when hundreds of thousands of men and women, made in His image, love and hate, and grieve and suffer, and lift up praying hands to Heaven, and struggle half-blindly on to the consummation of their fate?

I may be wrong, and what I am about to say may not command your universal assent, but I do not think that the conditions of moral life are radically different in town and country. We compare the ivy-clad cottage, with its neat garden in front, its fresh country air blowing about it, its pleasant outlook upon the fields, with the close, dull, court-house, round which the dirt gathers grimily, and the voices of rude revel and ruder contention always echo, and ask whether it is possible that men should live here as they do there? I concede all that is asked as to the force of external circumstance: I have already said, more than once, that contagion is quickest and most deadly where men are most crowded together. But, allowance made for this, I think that the chief difference between town and country is, that the former necessarily draws together, and presents in a mass, elements of life that

in the latter are scattered and therefore inconspicuous. Is there no village drunkenness, no rural unchastity? The baser class gravitate to the towns, where they think they can hide themselves; but they are not all produced there, and are perhaps not least manageable in the light of day. But these things fill me with a conviction that grows deeper every hour, that when we have done whatever law, whatever philanthropy, can do to improve the external life of the very poor in our large towns—when houses are what they should be, and all the appliances of decent living within reach—a revolution will still have to be effected which only education and religion can work. The true kingdom of God grows, not from without but from within. Hearts need cleansing more even than houses. For out of men's hearts are the issues of their lives.

And take courage, I beseech you, from the quaint words with which my text, and the book of Jonah also, closes. "Shall I not," saith God, "have mercy upon Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six-score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?" Doth God, then, care for oxen? Yea, for the meanest thing that breathes. And how much more, therefore, for the drunkard and the harlot, in whom His image is being daily defaced, and for all who are willing to take the burthen of *their* misery and *their* wretchedness upon their own shoulders!

VIII.

Two Worlds.

PSALM civ. 16:

"The trees of the Lord are full of sap; the cedars of Lebanon which He hath planted."

PSALM xxxi. 16:

"Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant: save me for Thy mercies' sake."

I WAS joining not long ago in the service of a country church, full of a congregation that was to all appearance devout. It was the very height of summer: all the doors were open: and as we knelt we could see the green leaves flickering in the sun, and no great effort of imagination was necessary to body forth the warm, quick life that was all about us: butterfly and beetle sporting through their little day, birds on household cares intent, flowers in their orderly succession of bloom, fruit ripening in the summer warmth. It was one of those days, one of

those seasons, in which the earth seems to lie serenely in the smile of God—when all physical vitality is at its quietest and its fullest—and the thought of storm and conflict and loss never suggests itself. And we had only to wander a little way, I knew, through leafy lanes or by sunny meadows, to reach a sea, still, translucent, changing, opal-like, from palest green to brightest purple, which gently rose and fell upon sands which it hardly stirred except to smooth them for the bather's foot. But within? Ah, we were singing none but sad songs: and the burthen of the Litany rose and fell—Lord, have mercy! Christ, have mercy! Good Lord, deliver us! and when there was a fuller anthem of praise, it was for redemption from sin, and the ransom of humanity, by God's goodness, from powers of evil. And the contrast between gladness without and gloom within, struck home to my conscience and my heart.

In the sharpness which I have given it, it was, I know, but a momentary contrast. Had the wind been howling round the tower, had the lightning been crashing among the trees, had the thunder drowned the music of our orisons, had the sea dashed itself in unavailing rage against the cliff, there would have been a felt accord between the stern face which Nature turned to us, and our attempts to placate a God who always needs propitiation. But look at the matter a little more narrowly, and you will see that the con-

trast remains true at a deeper level of thought and feeling. Nature is the realm of Law. Things continue as they have been since the beginning of the creation. The present is developed out of the past. Flowers have blossomed, fruit has ripened, birds have built their nests, butterflies have fluttered in the sun, tides have risen and fallen, for more centuries than we can count. The order of things, if good at all, is good as a whole: it is animated by one purpose, it moves towards one end. And religion, as it is ordinarily conceived, belongs not to the realm of law, but of catastrophe. There is a human race that has fallen away from the height of its destiny. There is a divine plan for frustrating one knows not what powers of evil, and restoring man to his place. There is a whole creation groaning and travailing together till its wrong be righted. There are an agony, a bloody sweat, a cross, which throw their shadow forward upon all generations. There is a God who still turns an angry face to men, unless His anger be appeased in the right way. And so it is that when Religion utters her most characteristic voice, it is to say, "Come, enter the darkness with me: clothe yourselves with sackcloth, scatter ashes upon your heads, and see whether it is not possible to lay hold on the great salvation of which you are so sorely in need." And all the while God, in the great world outside, is painting the lily and marking the falling sparrow.

We shall, however, fail to do justice to Christianity, even in the forms which it commonly assumes, unless we follow the thoughts which I have suggested a little further. In what mood does man really stand over against nature? I am not now speaking of such a natural theology as men invented in England a hundred years ago. It was an attempt to force nature, by logical methods, to reveal the secret of God: an attempt which, whether successful or the reverse, is felt now to represent but a small and hardly a characteristic part of the complex relation between man and the universe. Nay, we may even begin by asking, Does man really stand over against nature at all? It seems to be the supreme effort of modern science to convince him that he does not: that he is himself a part of all that he sees: that not only is he subject to physical laws and confined within the cycle of growth and decay, but that this statement covers the whole of his being and fate. There is but one hierarchy of life, in which it ascends, by infinitely slow gradations, from the lowest to the highest: and an added fulness of organization, a larger range of function, cannot break the chain which binds man to the ascidian from which he sprang. And so, if you carry out this theory to its furthest developments, free-will is a delusion, and conscience part of an automatic arrangement, and we, in every way, are bound within the iron rigidity of physical forces and laws, as the snow which seeks the

valley when the avalanche is full, or the climbing tendril which twists itself towards the light. Nor can we predicate of ourselves any duration but the changeful eternity which belongs to all matter. We dissolve into our component parts, and they again are welded into fresh combinations. But all that has constituted the I, this self which is so separate an island of being, the consciousness that has been its basis, the conscience in which it has chosen between opposing world-forces, the will in which it has made its weight felt—all this has been a delusion, and disappears as the mirage of the desert disappears when the tired traveller pitches his camp at nightfall.

How little I believe all this, you know: and yet I cannot help sympathizing, up to a certain point, with its view of nature. For there are moods, and these perhaps too rare, in which the overpowering sense of human individuality within us becomes for a while less keen, and we are better able to feel ourselves a part of the All of things. I know that we cannot help it: but we are too absolutely occupied with ourselves; we revolve too much round a fixed centre of gravity within; our own joys and sorrows, our own sins and sufferings, our own gains and losses, fill us too exclusively. To say that they are very near to us, is not enough: they are ourselves: apart from them we should be other than we are. Do you not know what it is to feel shut up in self as in a prison? Do you never think what

a deliverance it would be to look out of other eyes, to see men and things from a different point of view? This is a vain wish, I know: what we are, we must be as long as being lasts: but we come nearest to the liberty of which I speak when, if ever, we are able to conceive of ourselves as part of the mighty whole: when we do not so much judge, or admire, or investigate, or question Nature, as sink into her, owning the impact of her forces, and feeling her juices circulating in our veins: acknowledging a common life with bird and beast and insect, and knowing that there is that within us which is akin to the ordered restlessness of the sea, and the no less ordered rest of the crag that frowns upon it. Nor is this a mere mystical fancy, as some of you might be prompt to suppose: I am subject, in my place and degree, to natural laws: and the universal sap of things mounts and sinks in me too. And it is when I am most able thus to pass out of the narrow and fretful region of self into a larger and serener world, that I feel most content to be the subject of law and involved in a general order. What is best for the universe, I then am able to recognize as good enough for me. It is sufficient that I, in common with all other things, from the least to the greatest, "live and move and have my being in God."

Except in very rare cases, however, this can only be a passing mood. Every now and then, it may be, a life may be lived in entire and uninterrupted com-

munion with Nature, but it must be of the meditative much more than of the active type, and, either from circumstance or some peculiarity of constitution, unvexed by inward storms. For the one fact which, as it seems to me, conclusively disposes of the scientific fiction that man is a part of nature, as the oak is, or even the most sagacious of creatures, is that the moment a vivid sense of his own personality is awakened within him, his sympathy with the ordered All of things outside suffers sudden and complete interruption. It does not matter in what way that consciousness is aroused: when once it is aroused, the centre of gravity of things is for him changed: he is no longer an insignificant part of an infinitely greater whole, but the centre round which the universe revolves, and the beating of his own heart more to him than the movement of the spheres. It is an old story that when a great sorrow takes possession of us, we rebel against what we call the impassiveness of nature: the sun shines, the rain falls, day follows night, the tides observe their order, and leave us behind in our anguish, as if we were of no account—as, in truth, we are not. We bask in the summer warmth and are glad in the universal peace, when some sudden blow strikes us, and in a moment we loathe the light that was before so grateful. Even some petty yet clinging annoyance, or a mood of fretfulness that can be traced to a body ill at ease, is enough to disturb our accord with nature:

our thoughts are all turned within, and the physical framework and scenery of life become indifferent, if not positively irritating, to us. And there can be no better proof of the way in which sin dislocates the natural relations of life, than its power of utterly destroying our sympathy with the external grandeur and beauty. Sin, of course I mean, distinctly recognized as sin: not a mere casual missing of the way, but a felt offence against the holiness of God: not only present in the heart and eating out its strength, but discerned as actual weakness and degradation. In the throes of remorse, a man passes from the purely natural region into a higher, where the eternal gulf fixed between right and wrong is clearly discerned, in a gleam that comes from the throne of God. It is nothing to him then that seas are purple, and clouds changeful, and western skies full of glory: he sees a light that never was on sea or land, and beside it an awful gloom.

In this way it is that the world reveals itself to us as not single, but double. There is a natural world and a moral world, and we are denizens of both. They are strangely and subtly intermingled: it is only at crises of our fate that either vanishes for a moment and leaves us face to face with the other only. And from this peculiarity of our being it arises that so many attempts have been made, by metaphor, by analogy, by logic, to bind these two worlds in one: to

show that the physical is but the visible presentation of the moral, or to prove that the same truths are valid, the same laws authoritative, in both. Two worlds are ours, sings Keble, in one of his simplest and sweetest strains:

> Two worlds are ours—'tis only sin
> Forbids us to descry
> The mystic heaven and earth within,
> Plain as the sea and sky:

and then comes the logician, impatient of what he thinks to be mere flimsy metaphor, and tries to prove that natural laws are identical with moral government, and that the universe is no more than a veil through which we can dimly see the face of God. Perhaps we are not as confident in the statement of these coincidences as we once were. We build fewer metaphysical systems than we did, and are more content to rest in hints and similarities. But the two worlds remain for us, however incompletely we are able to bring them into relation: on this side of our being we are a part of Nature; on that, we stand apart from her and above her.

The contrast, then, remains between the gloom within the church and the gladness without: between the sad litany of men and the joyous song of birds. They belong to different worlds: these, to one in which law is never broken—those, to one in which it can never be completely kept. Here, "the trees of the Lord are full of sap;" He plants them, He bids

them grow upwards to the sky, and spread abroad their branches, and blossom and bear fruit in their season: and there, the word is, "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant: save me for Thy mercies' sake." I do not say that religion has no other utterance than this—God forbid!—but only that man on his religious side belongs to a world which at some time or other forces this cry from his lips. For when we go into the sanctuary of God, and there meditate upon what He is, and turn a quiet light of scrutiny upon ourselves, we are conscious of laws broken, with the inevitable penalty, of ideals unattained and unattainable, and a necessary sadness hanging over us. I do not know that it is always true to our religious consciousness that public worship should begin with the confession of sin and imperfectness: I turn away in repugnance from litanies whose aim it seems to be to weary into mercy One whose mercifulness is prompt and free beyond our best conception. But so long as we are what we are, this under-note of sadness must always mingle with our praise. It lies in the very nature of our strength that it should be plentifully dashed with weakness. It is involved in the grandeur of our fate that it should be crossed with gloom. The good that we have not done, the good that we see and cannot do, alike sadden us. Our mounting aspirations bear us upward to the very throne of God, and yet our feet refuse to leave this lower earth. It is not fear of

God that daunts us, but distrust of ourselves, and the very constancy of His help brings into sharper relief our own helplessness.

Yet, is there no exit for us into the sunlight outside, the quick life, the happy peace, the joyous voice, of the natural world? The answer to the question all depends upon whether God is to us the God of nature, as well as what theologians call the God of grace. If I am to think of Him as angry and appeased: as rejecting humanity from His love, and taking it back again upon due propitiation made: as suffering His creative purposes to be frustrated, and again suffering them to be made efficacious,—I cannot make the transition from the gloom of the church to the summer sunshine beyond. The two worlds will not be brought into correspondence. Here, all is law; there, all catastrophe. Theologians in some of their least reasonable moods tell us that the contrast does not exist: that the blight of sin is on the world's beauty: that no landscape is so fair as that the shadow of God's displeasure does not rest upon it: that the orderly cycle of birth, growth, decay, death, reveal what they call the trail of the serpent: and that, were it not for man's sin, the physical world itself would be infinitely brighter and more beautiful than it is. I cannot see it: were it not that beauty never satisfies, I should say that man might well be sated with the world's loveliness; and as its marvellous order slowly reveals itself to him,

he can conceive no intellectual beauty that should surpass it. And so while I believe with all my heart in grace, in divine helps and leadings, and tides of strength, and inflowings of peace coming out of the infinite depths of God's goodness into poor, tempted, struggling human souls—the God of grace is to me the God of nature too, whose work is one from the beginning, and whose purposes never fail. And the more I can feel myself in His hands, as are the cedars of Lebanon which He has planted—come sunshine, come storm—the more I am content. There are times when, in the bitterness of an alienation from Him which is my own making, not His, I must cry, "Make Thy face to shine upon Thy servant: save me for Thy mercies' sake:" but again, in the mountains that stand fast for ever, I see an image of His faithfulness—in the sea that runs round the earth, holding it in a grasp gentle at once and strong, a symbol of His all-embracing love. The trees of the Lord are full of sap, and to love Him is the secret of all our life.

IX.

Newness of Life.

A NEW YEAR'S SERMON.

ROMANS vi. 4:

"Even so we also should walk in newness of life."

2 CORINTHIANS v. 17:

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

GALATIANS vi. 15:

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature."

I HAVE put these passages together—though any one of them singly would have served my purpose—because they express in various phrase a characteristic mood of Pauline Christianity. A wonderful revolution in things human and divine had taken place. True, the world in its ordinary aspects went on as before: the sun did not forget his rising and his setting, the seasons followed their wonted round: the civilized Mediterranean earth lay prostrate at the feet of its Roman conquerors, and no

man lifted up a voice of remonstrance, much less an arm of rebellion. It was in no sense a period of political or literary or philosophical crisis: old forces were in mingled operation: what we see, as we look back, is development, transition, incipient decay. I am sure that no Greek moralist, no Roman thinker, would then have confessed to any consciousness of new thought, new life, new hope: he would have said much more that philosophical speculation had run all its possible round, and that there was no political hope for humanity but the Empire. It was reserved for Paul, the insignificant, mean-looking Rabbi, who journeyed always from city to city, purchasing by the labour of his hands the privilege of free teaching, for the Jewish sectaries whom he gathered about him, for the slaves who came secretly by night to listen to him, for the women who dared not speak of what he taught them above their breath,—it was reserved for them to feel the blood of a new life circulating in their veins, to breathe the intoxicating air of a new era of hope and effort for humanity. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." There is another translation of these words which gives them the same and yet a wider significance: "If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation." Not only is he, so to speak, made over again, but the whole universe is transfigured for him into fresh beauty and filled with a new meaning. It is as if he stood in the morning of the world, and

saw, with the eyes of God, that all things were very good. And these are the moments in which great thoughts fill the mind, and brave deeds are done.

It is not difficult to understand how Paul should have been in this mood. I do not suppose that, whatever Gentile training he had had, he took a very wide survey of what was going on in the world: the Jews were sectaries to their hearts' core, and measured the worth of all things by their effect upon themselves. The universal prevalence of Greek culture, the slow evolution of philosophical thought, the apparent stability of Roman institutions, would strike him less than the revolution which had suddenly taken place in the world which chiefly occupied his heart and hope. That the Temple, with all its ceremonial splendour, should pass away; that God's covenant with Abraham should assume a new form and a wider application; that an eternal and universal Gospel should take the place of a temporary and local Law; that Israel, in the impulse of a new inspiration, should suddenly fulfil the sublimest vaticinations of Isaiah, and stand out as the teacher of the nations—were things that, taken by themselves, might well persuade a Jew that he had been born at the very crisis of his country's fate, and was permitted to see the dawn of its triumph. And with Paul all this must have been enhanced by the profound consciousness of a new life which he felt stirring within him. He had passed from one

passionate allegiance to another. He had replaced old motives, old affections, old passions, by new ones. He was no longer the man who had listened in the school of Gamaliel, and kept the clothes of them that slew Stephen. He hated what he once loved, and loved what he once hated. But something more than change was working in him: a new life, a fresh principle of growth: he can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth him: he laughs at labour, he mocks at peril, he rises serene above discouragement, he is ready to welcome even death. What does it matter to him that Rome lies, as with a leaden load of oppression, upon the world? He has the secret of the only liberty which it is worth a man's while to gain. What concerns it him that Stoics and Epicureans dispute about things too high for them? He is convinced that in Christ he has entered into the mind and purposes of God. The external form of things is wearily and monotonously the same: cruelty still reigns in high places, and selfishness pursues its way unchecked; but to the eye of faith "there is a new creation:" "old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new:" before long the bud will break upon the branch, the fruit will be developed out of the flower, and the very wildernesses of humanity shake and sway with golden harvests.

Periods of revolution can be understood only by times like themselves: when the wheels of fate roll

heavily, when only common forces are in operation, when to-day seems the natural and necessary development of yesterday, heroic efforts are impossible, and heroic expectations seem overstrained. Suppose I were to tell you that now, even now, the kingdom of God is at our doors, and that it needed only a hearty desire for its blessed rule to bring it in? You would not believe me: your imaginations would be far more caught by the hindrances in the way than kindled by the undoubted possibility, and you would think far more of an election to be won to-morrow, or of a speculation that may turn out well next week. And the new kind of philosophers (not, I admit, without some show of right on their side also) would occupy themselves in proving that the fate of nations and of races depends on a thousand slowly working forces, all of which are physical in their origin, and which, never hasting, never resting, accomplish their effect at last. But it was not quite in this mood that the young Galilean Prophet, in the first glad beginning of his ministry, declared that he saw Satan, like lightning, fall from heaven; or that Paul, feeling in himself the operation of omnipotent spiritual forces, exclaimed, "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The world, in more senses than one, has been too much for Christianity, and not least in this, that it has lost its faith in divine possibilities for men on the largest scale, and has learned to be shame-

fully content with the day of small things. What is its doctrine of salvation? A rescuing of one or two favoured souls from the deck of the burning ship, leaving the rest to go down to the everlasting depths, unpitied and forgotten. What its theory of the kingdom of God? A dim and doubtful heaven, offered to the weary and the sorrowful, in place of a reformed and renovated earth. What its teaching of the things that are to come? Not a gradual lifting up of humanity to the comprehension of Christ and the loving service of God, but a decline into a corruption so desperate as to evoke at last the destroying anger of the Judge. At what a woful distance do we stand now from the faith which bade those poor Hebrew teachers of the first century, ignorant of the world, and of the world unknown, believe in the new creation that was at hand!

The philosophers are right, you will say; even if you hesitate to pronounce Paul wrong. Eighteen hundred years have passed away, and all things continue as they were from the beginning, except in so far as they have been modified by the slowly working forces aforesaid. But are you quite sure of that? I, too, believe in the slowly working forces—I were blind and foolish if I did not: but are they the only thing in the universe that moves and acts? It is against this narrow supposition that I understand Christianity to make a perpetual protest: it believes in great waves

of spiritual influence, of which it is itself a signal example: it holds up to view the interference of God in human affairs: it makes much of strong individualities, divine persons. We are pursuing the same line of argument when we note that there are times in the history of every noble race in which it is, as it were, fused to white heat by some self-forgetting passion, and, in the strength of patriotic self-defence or the upward flight of social aspiration, accomplishes great things. Heroism is common then: the ignorant and the lowly are lifted above the ordinary level: and it is seen of what daring, patience, fortitude, self-sacrifice, even average humanity is capable. But all this depends, you must notice, upon faith and constancy of men. It is only in and by human souls that God can work upon humanity. We cannot define the measure of divine and human action in the history of any single soul; but it is hardly too much to say that there are times of stolid self-satisfaction, of contented absorption in the material interests of life, which God leaves to themselves and the working out of their own fate. Whereas, on the other side, effort draws down inspiration, faith compels blessing, self-sacrifice unseals the fountain of strength, and men, doing all they can, find that God is on their side, and that nothing is impossible to them. And so, if the new creation be yet unaccomplished, what delays it but human cowardice and faithlessness? If once we really believed

the kingdom of God possible, it would be already established.

The same things apply, and in precisely the same way, to the individual life. We are, we are told, slow growths, gradual developments, in mind and character, as well as in body. We have been in preparation for generations past; what our fathers and mothers were, that are we: nor is it any reason for doubting the reality of the process that we cannot trace its every step. Circumstance, education, habit, occupation, have been forming us from the beginning: all our past achievements, all our old failures, are with us yet, woven, as it were, into the stuff of our nature. We cannot start off on new lines, we cannot break into unwonted activities, any more than we can change our identity or jump off our own shadow: except in a very limited sense, what we have been, we are, and must continue to be. I hardly expect my younger hearers to feel the full force of these considerations, but I know I need not urge them upon the elder: *we* feel every day more acutely the loss of versatility, moveableness, originality; and are wont to consider character as a kind of shell that thickens round us, limiting and hindering growth. And, again, it is against these opinions and experiences, true and real in their place and degree, that Christianity makes its protest. It persists in regarding all the possibilities of humanity as being always before every soul. It despairs of

neither the blackest wickedness, nor the most stolid indifference, nor the most heart-broken weariness, nor the most absolute slavery to habit. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature." Nay, the "new creature" is the one thing needful, in comparison of which nothing external, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, availeth anything. To-day, it says to all the weary and heavy-laden—to-day, you may, if you will, cast off all your burthen, and enter into the liberty of the sons of God.

Paul proclaims this truth: but Christ had already acted upon it. All his dealings with sin and shame were based upon this, that he never despaired of humanity. But somehow we almost always fail to realize the full depth and meaning of the example: we fancy, for instance, that Mary Magdalen, if she be indeed the woman that was a sinner, had the predestined saint hidden beneath the cloak of her offence, and that what the Master did was to discern the fair and fragrant flower within the brown and scaly bud. But what if he did not so much discern the saint as create her? I think that it was under the magic of his generous faith in human goodness, even in the midst of sin, that goodness began to grow, and shame-faced modesty to return to her ancient seats, till at last grateful love broke forth in a stream that could not be stayed, melting the heart and changing all the life. You, who believe in Christ, are soberly convinced

that to him no moral miracle could be impossible. You would trust his charm implicitly in any exigency of human nature. You are sure that, were he here to-day, the most petrified conscience would thrill to his touch, the coldest heart be surprised into a sudden glow. It was his divine prerogative, you say: yes, but only divine in the sense that into the divine rises whatever is most truly and intensely human. Believe, as Christ believed, that to faith, love, sympathy, all things are possible, and you will find that the age of miracles has come back.

Yet with Scribes and Pharisees even Christ could do nothing; and the very band of the Apostles, who lived all day in the light of his presence, and drank in every word of his lips, held a traitor. Must we then sin deeply ere we can walk in newness of life, and pass through moral death that we may rise again? Some notion of this kind has been very prevalent in all Christian ages: great saints have taken a kind of delight in proving that they had first been great sinners: and a common and superficial religiousness of our own day teaches its neophytes to blacken their own character, that they may enhance the glory of their deliverance. What I take to be the truth is, that newness of life, if ever attained, is born of a certain passion in the soul, that may indeed be produced by the smart of remorse and the self-abasement of repentance, yet may have another genesis also. The time

of self-abasement always comes, I know, to one who enters at all deeply into the new existence: in its light, the old life shows so unspeakably poor and mean, in its strength, the old effort so nerveless and commonplace, as to make retrospect one long occasion of self-reproach. But my thesis is, that it is to the stolid, the self-satisfied, the cold of heart, the dull of conscience—respectable men and women often, as were the Pharisees too in their day, holding high positions in society, and universally well spoken of—to these the word of Christ never comes with vivifying and renovating power. It glances off their self-conceit like an arrow from a mailed corslet. It finds no tender spot in which it can fix, and quiver with a healing smart. Why should they desire a new creation, when they are so supremely satisfied with the old? So they continue to move through the mechanical round of dull compliance, and miss the raptures and the throes, the agonies and ecstasies, of life.

You know already why I have said these things to you to-day: the thought of the new year has been in all our minds as I have spoken and you have listened. Shall it be the only new thing in us and about us? A changed date, and, beyond that, all things as they have been? Are we so well satisfied with our lives as to believe that we stand in need of nothing new, or so lame in faith as to doubt whether any new thing is possible to us? The first I cannot believe, when I

look into my own heart. A new spring of faith in God and the wise goodness of His providence, a new energy of obedience, a new power of aspiration, a new trust in the future of humanity, a new outflowing of sympathy towards all suffering and sin, a new principle of growth, a new conception of service—all these things I need to lift me a little nearer the ideal of my life. Is it I alone who need them? The same kind of service is not asked of all: the same temptations do not beset us all: the same faculties have not been given to us all: but the problem of our life is one and the same, and so too its strength and weakness. And if there be any here who doubt whether newness of life be not the dream of a prophet, rather than the experience of waking common sense, I point them to a thousand victories won over self and the world, a thousand grand things achieved for suffering humanity, in the strength that can only come of yielding oneself captive, in willing faith, in eager expectation, to the charm of Christ and all goodness. Yes, once more, at the beginning of a new year, I repeat the old Pauline word, believing it to be true, and desiring to prove its truth by happy experience, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."

X.

God's Helpful Judgments.

PSALM cxix. 175:

"Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee; and let Thy judgments help me."

I HAVE found a quaint and pathetic fragment of Catholic legend in a strange place—embedded, namely, in those ninety-five Theses against Indulgences, which were the first blow struck by Luther in the battle of the Reformation. The story is there alluded to that St. Paschal and St. Severin were unwilling to be released from purgatorial fires, preferring the further endurance of the cleansing pain, to the risk of encountering the Beatific Vision with hearts not yet wholly purged of earthly sin and passion. "A true contrition," says Luther in the fortieth Thesis, throwing the same principle into abstract shape, "loves and desires punishment." And I find the same deep spiritual truth exquisitely expressed by Cardinal Newman in his poem of the "Dream of Gerontius."

There the departed soul, which has already left earth behind and is about to enter the place of fiery probation, sings:

Take me away, and in the lowest deep
There let me be,
And there in hope the lone night-watches keep
Told out for me.
There, motionless and happy in my pain,
Lone, not forlorn,—
There will I sing my sad perpetual strain,
Until the morn.
There will I sing, and soothe my stricken breast,
Which ne'er can cease
To throb, and pine, and languish, till possest
Of its Sole Peace.
There will I sing my absent Lord and Love:—
Take me away,
That sooner I may rise, and go above,
And see Him in the truth of everlasting day.

There is a certain material distinctness in Catholic presentations of religious truth, which, if it often offends the finer spiritual sense, and encourages the growth of gross superstitions in the popular mind, at the same time brings out moral contrasts into strong relief. This doctrine of Purgatory, for example, is crude enough as popularly apprehended. It seems to be a sheer misapplication of an obvious figure of speech to conceive of evil affections and desires as being burned out of the soul, as you throw something hard and indestructible into the fire that it may be cleansed of stains that will not yield to any less

rigorous and searching treatment. And yet I have often felt that the idea of an interposed period of sharper and more conscious probation than is possible here, is truer to the spiritual facts of the case than the Protestant notion of the sharp division of all souls into two classes of saved and lost, and the immediate transference of the spirit either to hopeless companionship with evil or absolute enjoyment of good. Nor, surely, could anything bring before the mind with greater vividness the essential sympathy of a righteous soul with righteousness, than this story of old saints so submissive to the judgments of God, so eager to try His discipline to the uttermost, so full of passionate desire for the holiness that could be won in no easier way, as to be willing to put off deliverance from the cleansing pain, if it were to be bought at the slightest cost of derogation from final achievement. Can you not easily conceive of them as taking the Psalmist's word upon their lips, "Let my soul live, and it shall praise Thee;" as if the life of the soul, its lively awe, its quick sympathy with good, its eagerness for effectual service, were indeed everything: and "Let Thy judgments help me," since no way that truly leads to life is too hard for faithful feet to tread?

In days like these, when men take no shame in slipping from under whatever is painful and disagreeable, when pleasure is openly formulated as the mainspring of life, and even goodness is resolved into a

form of self-pleasing, it is not easy to go back to the old thought that righteousness is the chief thing, and that righteousness is to be bought only at the price of toil and conflict and pain. And especially it is not easy to believe and act as if God's judgments could help us. We know, those of us at least who take in any way a religious view of life, that they are there: that there is no escaping them: that they will work themselves out: that, after some fashion or other, we must bear them. But I doubt whether we often rise beyond a passive submission to the inevitable. We are apt to wish that they were not inevitable, and are quite ready to get out of them if only we could. If God would only take His hand off us, we should rejoice in His goodness with a much freer heart than we praise His justice. We make our punishments too much a matter of His personal, almost arbitrary, judgment of us: we do not rise to the conception of a world-order which is essentially best for us and all other men, and against which, if we offend, we must take the consequences. Somehow we are able to dissociate in thought our own righteousness from the general rightness, and think that that can be preserved, though for the moment we and our lives stand outside of it. And all the while it is not a hard, impersonal Fate, compassing us about as with bands of iron, with which we have to deal: or a variable God, who now yields and now resists, accord-

ing to the urgency of our prayer or the motions of His own compassion: but One who, having stayed all things on righteousness, knowing that righteousness is highest and best, trains His children in firm kindness, by compelling them, so far as may be, to live through and live down their weakness and their sin. And so any conception of an Atonement which interposes to save men from the consequences of their actions, is condemned as contrary to the ordinary and necessary course of God's providence. Whatever restores a human soul to that communion with and trust in Divine Love which is the highest privilege and best strength of humanity, is an atonement indeed. But not only must we reap as we have sown, but such retribution, rightly borne, is our highest spiritual good. To relieve us from it, the boon which so many men eagerly desire, would be the act of cruelty masquerading in the shape of pity.

The judgments of the Lord will come—of that there can be no doubt; but whether they will help us depends largely upon ourselves. The longer I live, the more I think about religion, the more inseparable does it seem to be from the existence of free choice and self-determination in man. By no effort of thought can I construct on any other basis a scheme of moral relation between man and God; and I note that others, who claim to be more successful in this respect than myself, still cannot speak of religion without using

language that runs counter to their theory. And so, although the retributions, or, if you like to call them so, the judgments of God, exist and must run their course, the moral application which we make of them is largely our own affair. Many men use them—if, indeed, the phrase use is not here inapplicable—as the beasts would, kicking against the pain that they bring with them, but neither recognizing the violated law nor discerning that they contain a lesson. Or some perhaps never find out their meaning till it is too late: till the will is hopelessly enfeebled, till the springs of moral renovation are utterly relaxed, and nothing is left but to die in a weakness and despair to which they have condemned themselves. And some, again, in the very madness of self-will, will not acknowledge that they are pitting their feeble and transient strength against forces that are omnipotent and eternal, and persevere in rebellion, till at last they are forced to the earth, helpless, crushed, broken. For effectual teaching there must be some accessibility of mind, some docility of heart, on the part of the learner. God cannot compel a free spirit: He can only warn, rebuke, persuade, discipline. And it depends upon this fundamental fact of human freedom, apart from which we cannot even conceive of a divine education of man, that so many lives seem to end in failure, and that the best objects of existence are so rarely reached.

Is it not upon the conviction that all punishments

of God must be educational, remedial, medicinal, that the essential immorality of endless punishment rests? I am not speaking now of its relation to God's goodness—that is quite another side of the discussion—but to His justice. And the moral quality of the endlessness is brought out by the contrasted idea of purgatory, which is essentially a transitory state, with an end of reformation in view: the torment may in any particular case last for tens, hundreds, thousands of years, but the result at last is that the purified soul betakes itself, all earthly stain purged away, all possibility of falling back escaped, to the eternal enjoyment of God. But hell, if it exists, is filled with the utter failures of the Divine method. It is a seething mass of unredeemed evil, growing fouler and blacker in its own company and self-contemplation. It has no worthy object, for, by its very hypothesis, no faintest end of good can by it be realized. In it, retribution becomes mere cruelty—divine punishment, blank vengeance. "Forsake all hope, O ye who enter here!" was the dread inscription which Dante read upon the portal of his Inferno. But in so reading he condemned it to the realm of things wholly hideous and impossible. For so long as God lives, and wherever His power extends, there is always hope for man.

I once read an exposition, and, as I suppose he thought it, a defence of endless punishment, by the great Anglo-Catholic divine whom we lost a year or

two ago. But Dr. Pusey in his use of current religious phrases, and Dr. Pusey in the spiritual meaning which he put upon them, were two different men; and he showed sometimes how near the orthodox Doctor could approach the heresiarch. He gave up the material flame, the physical torture. The true hell—so sharp that men wanted no other—was conscious alienation from God. A soul that possessed and loved God would praise Him joyfully in the very midst of the lapping fires, while, to one incapable of such divine communion, no heaven that could be conceived would be other than a pain and a weariness. But suppose, he said, a soul that, in the exercise of its indubitable liberty of choice, for ever rebelled against God, for ever preferred evil to good, for ever was deaf to rebuke, intractable to discipline, callous to the pleading of love, untouched by the thrill of moral sympathy. What then? If its revolt was eternal, must not the hell to which it was self-condemned be eternal too? How can the gates of heaven unclose to receive one who obstinately refuses to put on a wedding garment? It is all true: there can be no deeper or more spiritual theory of retribution than is involved in this statement. But then all its depth and spirituality depend upon the tacit supposition that Divine punishment is not necessarily and in itself endless, but that it ceases when its work is done, and always looks forward to its own cessation. So that Dr. Pusey, if he were still

willing to defend the endlessness of punishment, could do so only by denying the moral omnipotence of God. If hell were to repent, it would in that very act cease to be hell: and it can continue to be hell only on the supposition that God wills the perpetuation—nay, the eternity of evil.

But to return from these high speculations to matters with which we are in daily touch, we must do something more than submit ourselves to God's judgments if they are to help us. I have already said that there are many negative ways of taking them, ranging from a brutal insensibility to their true nature, to a mad rebellion against their force which perishes in its madness. On the other hand, we enter on the right path when we recognize the retributive, the disciplinary, the medicinal element in trouble, and set ourselves to work together with God's will in regard to us. "Why am I afflicted?" is a question that may be asked with a double voice: it may be the mere petulance of resentment accusing the justice of God, or, again, an inarticulate cry of self-accusation, an acknowledgment that all sorrow veils a Divine moral purpose. I do not say that sorrow is always the fruit of sin, in the sense that we can take our trouble and lay our hand on the weakness, the self-indulgence, the transgression, that produced it: the moral world is the theatre of action of many crossing forces, many mingled effects: the fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth

are set on edge: we smart for others' offences, and pay the penalty of others' irresolution. But I do say that we do not even begin to realize the moral purpose of life, so long as we look upon our pains and sorrows as sent upon us out of the mere volition of God: so long as we regard them only as proof of His personal kindness or unkindness to us: so long as we do not recognize them as part of a general moral order, from which we cannot emancipate ourselves, and in conformity with which lie our best strength, our only stable peace. It is the very purpose of God's judgments to help us: He is never kinder to us than when He seems sternest and hardest, for then He is moulding us to fortitude, inuring us to patience, burning into us the majesty of righteousness.

Have you not noticed that there is a region of human endurance above complaint? We complain most, I think, of petty vexations, small annoyances, trifling pains: often our mourning voice is hushed when a great grief takes hold of us and fills us wholly. A strong soul feels that about its own tragedy there can be nothing mean and small: it is an elemental struggle that is going on within it, and the forces involved—life and death, love and loss, sin and righteousness—are those that move the world. And even in the case of pure suffering, unalloyed, undeserved, hopeless of relief, there is often a quietness of patience, a resolvedness of endurance, that puts to shame the

uneasy fretfulness with which men meet lesser and transient troubles. It comes of the profound belief in the helpfulness of God's judgments. Such patient sufferers do not ask the why or the wherefore: in all likelihood they have no other prospect than patience to the last, and beyond the last a firm reliance on the Divine goodness: their way of life is hopelessly blocked: the world for them is all within the four walls of their room, and their bed their battle-field. But they are learning to be patient, even cheerful under pain: to accept small benefits at the hand of God with a great gratitude: to win, in constant dependence upon the kindness of others, the blessing of the poor in spirit: to feel that the God who to the more worldly judgment may seem to have forsaken them, was never so near to them as in this their extremity. And if to live with God be the chief thing, then have they more completely solved the problem of existence than those whom His judgments have apparently passed by.

Are you beginning to see now why those old saints were said to have been unwilling to be redeemed from purgatorial fires? They not only submitted themselves to the judgments of God, but they recognized their helpfulness, they desired them with a great desire. And this, I think, is the best and highest nobleness of which human nature is capable: to be so fired with the love of righteousness, to be so profoundly con-

vinced that with holiness no other good thing can be compared, as almost to fear lest God should use us too mercifully, that He should not expend upon us all the resources of His discipline, that He should leave upon us some stain of earth not wholly purged away. It is a moral extravagance, you say: an effort of self-renunciation which, looked at in the light of common sense, shows itself as impossible: after all, only a mediæval legend, embodying an unreal aspiration. Perhaps so: but the foolishness of faith is often more instructive, more inspiring, than the wisdom of the world; and I think with wonder, not untempered with love, of Paschal and Severin asking for a longer trial of fire, that in the end they might perfectly love God.

XI.

Rejoice in the Lord.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 1:

"My brethren, rejoice in the Lord."

THIS is the key-note of the Epistle to the Philippians. It is struck at the very beginning: "always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy." It makes itself heard through the Apostle's story of the envy and strife which mingled with some preaching of the gospel: "What then? Notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." When he is in a strait betwixt two, not knowing whether he should not desire to depart and be with Christ, he knows that he shall abide and continue with his children, for their "furtherance and joy of faith." Even the uttermost extremity of self-spending is a fresh occasion of rejoicing: "Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all. For the

same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me." And as if the exhortation of the text were not enough, "For the rest, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord," he recurs to the theme a little further on, in a clarion note that rings out high and pure, above all dulness of despondency, above all weakness of discouragement, above all murmur of complaint, above all sullenness of distrust, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice."

Yet Paul was a prisoner in Rome, waiting till his appeal to Cæsar should be heard, and in the mean time chained day and night to some legionary, who, probably brutal, surely careless, could not but resent his own imprisonment on the captive he was set to guard. And thus the Apostle passes into the darkness. I do not in the least believe the tradition which sets him free for a second period of missionary labour in the West, and then brings him back to Rome to die; but even if it be true, he is practically lost to our sight from this moment. From the time at which he first appears, keeping the clothes of them that stoned righteous Stephen, till now, we know him as we know few great men of a distant past: he has himself opened his soul to us: the subtle workings of his mind, the anxieties of his conscience, the passionate throbbings of his heart—we can watch and weigh them all. And now that the end is almost come, what has he accomplished? In the eyes of men, not much: he has founded

certain obscure communities, half-Jewish, half-Gentile, in a few Greek cities; but they are divided against themselves, and it is doubtful whether the acknowledged representatives of the Christian tradition will own them. Jerusalem, which he loved with so passionate an affection, has been deaf to his pleading; and, except a faithful soul here and there, Rome is hardly more disposed to listen. At the very moment when the flame of evangelic enthusiasm was burning most brightly in his heart, he had lain two years in hold in Cæsarea, helpless, hopeless, silent; and after a voyage to Italy, in which it seemed as if the very waves and winds had conspired against him, he had again found the delays, the inaction, the fretting limitations, of what was little better than a prison. The great Roman world rolled on its luxurious way in utter carelessness of him or the message which he had to deliver: his brethren of Israel looked on him with more than doubtful eyes: it seemed as if the shroud of failure were already wrapped around him, and death could not be very far off. Yet in this Epistle of the Captivity there is no downcast word. It is full of a courage which is not only stern, resolute, patient, but bright and cheerful. If we were to judge from it alone, we should say that for Paul life had no leaden hours of despondency, no moments of passionate complaint against God, no pangs of sorrow which faith could not bravely meet and overcome. Like a caged lark, if he

cannot soar, he can still sing; and his song is of the heavens and the joys thereof—ringing combat and bright victory—a patience that cannot be daunted, a love that cannot be shaken. And his words—to us his last words—are irradiate with "the light that never was on sea or land."

Did you ever read the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius? It is one of the great religious books of the world; and I think I see signs of its becoming, in certain exclusive and distinguished intellectual circles, a fashionable manual of devotion. It was a strange accident that placed one who was at once a philosopher and the best of men upon the throne of the world; or shall I say that it was the design of God to exhibit, once for all, the contrast between the kingliness that is born to a throne, and that which can find none, save the mockery of the cross and an everlasting place in the hearts of men? However this may be, it was a sweet and noble character, carefully trained in the precepts of the Stoical philosophy, that made Marcus Aurelius what he was: what his imperial destiny did, was only to lift him up to a pinnacle of human observation, laying upon his shoulders the burthen of a vast responsibility, and bidding him attempt the performance of duties too hard, too various, for any single will. We can hardly judge his actions in detail; his reign is one that lacks contemporary record; and we know his troubles better than the way in which he

met them. His colleague in the empire was worthless: his son and successor, a disgrace to humanity: scandal busied itself with his wife's fair fame: storm, pestilence, earthquake, united to persuade a superstitious people that the gods had abandoned Rome: he spent a large part of his reign in inglorious frontier wars, and mutiny in his own legions aided the barbarian beyond the Danube. But if his policy is often obscure to us, we know his mind and his heart. We owe to the hours in which he retired to the solitude of his tent, and there questioned his own soul, the self-drawn picture of a singularly lofty and noble character, of which no lapse of time can dim the charm. There is not a trace of boastful egotism in it: the lines are few and of a severe simplicity: a genuine humility breathes through it all, as becomes a man who, Emperor though he be, feels the perpetual presence of more august realities, and a power more stable. His incredulity of evil almost frets the reader; one is tempted to accuse his patience of unmanly sluggishness. But we close the book with the thought, Here is a man upon whom came the greatest of earthly destinies, and who has shown himself equal to a greater!

And yet it is all so sad. No irrepressible note of joy breaks through here; no gleam of light, that will not be denied, rests upon the page. I have told you that fate tried Marcus Aurelius hardly, though not more hardly than Paul; and he meets his destiny with

a quiet courage, a steady patience, which are beyond praise. But it is plain that life is a burthen to him. He will not voluntarily lay it down, as so many Romans, and those not the unworthiest, did in that day: he has the feeling of a soldier, who may not leave his post till the word of command comes. The clouds overhead are one dull grey: he can discern no pilot stars. No word of complaint escapes him as to what we think must have been his troubles: on the contrary, he is full of love and gratitude to friends and teachers; and thanks the gods for having given him a perfect wife. It is life itself, under any conditions, that is profoundly mysterious and unsatisfactory to him: to the last he will leave no duty unfulfilled; to the last he will bear up bravely against the shocks of fortune; but he is unfeignedly glad when the summons of release comes, and he can slip his neck out of the yoke at nightfall, as a tired ox that has toiled all day in the furrow.

And now it seems as if the cloud of philosophic sadness were beginning to overshadow men once more. Perhaps this is part of a larger phenomenon than itself: our age is excited, feverish, burnt up now by hot enthusiasms, and again shivering in chills of unbelief, proud of its knowledge, exultant in its freedom, but hardly able to rejoice in God, in man, in life, with a strong and serene joy. At one prevalent form of melancholy I do not wonder: the dull sadness which

comes, when the initial impulse of life is exhausted over men who have drunk the cup of common pleasures to the dregs, nor have ever learned the secret of nobler delights. The story of their despondency is one which every age has to tell: they have mistaken the moral purpose and method of existence, and do not find out their error till it is too late to repair it. But what strikes me at the present moment is the growing sadness of men whom I cannot refrain from calling good. They are not, it is true, believing men in the old sense of the word: that is the root of the whole matter. They take life on the naturalistic side: but they try to fill it with noble purposes and fine actions: they measure themselves by a high moral standard: often they burn with the enthusiasm of humanity. But the note of difference between men and women like these and the Christian saints, is precisely their want of joyfulness. Their hopes and expectations have a sombre cast. They endure life much more than enjoy it. They are severe in applying to themselves the spur of duty, but it is because they do not feel within the untiring impulse of love. All this, it may be, is little visible, so long as the blood courses healthfully in their veins, and youth will recognize no obstacles, and sorrow and failure and disappointment are things in the far future: but for philosophers and saints alike, life is one: its griefs must be borne, its hindrances must be surmounted, its

losses cannot be evaded, its decay must be patiently endured. I suppose that a certain shade of sadness comes over us all as we grow older: if it were not so, we should be more or less than human: memory begins to prevail over anticipation: love claims the right of looking back; and the contrast between what we are and what we would have been is always present. But in the case of those of whom I am speaking, there is something more than this: sorrow seems to strike them to the ground with disabling force: there is always the doubt whether life, even at its best, be worth living; and as for life at its worst—when hopeless failure closes it round, when slow agony gnaws shrinking tissues as day wanes into night, and night wakens into day—when the light of love is quenched in utter darkness—ah! what is life at its worst but a restless weariness, a clinging curse?

I was looking with almost fond admiration, only the other day, at the Venus of Milo, in the Louvre, and I thought of Heinrich Heine prostrate at her feet. He, the most brilliant, the most sarcastic, the most audacious of all mockers, he loved her too, and found in her the embodiment of all that Hellas had to teach of beauty. This is not the place to try to describe what is in truth indescribable: broken, roughened, armless as she is, she returns your gaze with a perfect loveliness, a consummate grace, which seem to belong to another and a less troubled world. And it was to

her pedestal that Heine dragged himself when the terrible disease which made his last years one long, slow, growing agony, had laid hold on him, yet still left him able to move; till looking up into her face with pitiful desire of comfort, and yet with a mind and heart in which some longing for a living God was beginning to stir, she said to him, or seemed to say, "Do you not see that I have no arms and cannot help you?" Men are finding out now, slowly perhaps but surely, that philosophy too is armless and helpless, and that in the great crises of life, the agonies of a man's soul, they need the outstretched arms of one who cries, "Come unto me."

"Better," some will say, "better meet an inexplicable fate, with which so many strands of sadness are interwoven, with such natural patience, such inborn heroism, as we can command, than trust the deceitful anodyne of unsubstantial hopes and unfounded faiths! If it be a man's intellectual lot to believe nothing, let him at least honestly regulate his life on that footing: regulate it by lies or half-beliefs he cannot." I have no rejoinder to make: life and faith, I admit, must correspond. But I am not conducting an argument, so much as exhibiting a contrast, and that is not invalidated by the moral integrity which is so often an honourable characteristic of unbelief. And it remains true that the Christian does not sadly succumb to life, or patiently bear it, but conquers it. Deride

the intellectual basis of his faith as you may—demonstrate that he believes far more than he can prove—show that he relies upon instincts which you treat as fallacious, and lives upon hopes which earth and time can never realize—the fact abides that he rejoices in the Lord. He cannot fear for his own safety, for he feels beneath him the Everlasting Arms. No failure daunts him, for he knows that his poor efforts succeed in the precise proportion in which they accord with the Divine purposes. Even the world's sin and misery do not depress him out of measure, for he discerns "the one far-off divine event, to which the whole creation moves," and believes that with his toil and prayer the better day draws nearer. And for the sorrows that will come, the blows that must be borne, the losses that must be faced, doubtless they are hard to him as to other men. But if he knows that he has a Father of an infinite compassion and a very perfect wisdom, who for all men ordereth all things aright,—One, moreover, into whose divine heart he can breathe his sorrows and despondencies, and whence he can draw comfort as from a perennial spring,—and if he can let his own fate go, believing that there are better things, things even nearer to *him*, than his personal joys and sorrows, and that the main thing after all is that God's kingdom should come and His will be done in earth as it is in heaven,—why should he *not* cry, even at the moment of his bitterest desolation,

even when the cloud lies heaviest on his life, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth"?

You will have discerned already that I take the word joy in its highest sense. We speak, with no feeling of incongruity, of the joy of God: and the parallel phrase on the human side is, "rejoice in the Lord." There is the half-unconscious joy of animated nature: the sportive leap of the lamb by its mother's side: the quick dart of the trout in the transparent brook: the clear, bright laughter of little children. There is the joy of love, in which the youth folds to his heart the maiden who is henceforth all in all to him: and the sweet rapture of content with which the mother looks upon her new-born child. There is the joy of successful effort, as when the painter sees his dream begin to grow upon the canvas, and the poet first sings the song that has murmured itself into his ear: or, as these joys are always dashed with partial failure, there is the joy of struggle for some worthy object, long, stern, asking perpetual sacrifice, in itself perhaps sweeter (for such is the mystery of human life) than the joy of attainment. There is the joy of self-surrender, more poignant in proportion as it is complete, as when the patriot slowly dies in prison sooner than betray one jot of ancestral freedom, or the martyr smiles at the faggots that for him are to make unfaithfulness to truth impossible evermore. And all these rise up into and are consummate in the joy

which comes of sympathy with truth, goodness, righteousness: joy in the Divine order, joy in unbroken law, joy in the gradual realization of God's purpose, joy in the final triumph of God's will. And I suppose it was Paul's ability to rise out of the narrowness of his personal lot—the Roman prison, the chained legionary, the jealous brethren, the near martyrdom—into this ampler air of aspiration and affection, that made it natural for him to bid the Philippians "rejoice in the Lord." Nor do I believe that this highest and keenest of all joys was long absent from the mind of him whom a mistaken ideal persists in regarding as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," even when he hung in torture upon his solitary cross, and the people, for whom he had given his life, mocked at his long-drawn agony.

I present to you, then, the idea of religion as the guarantee of the highest joys of humanity, and the Church as their guardian. Nor am I here repeating the familiar thought that "Religion never was designed to make our pleasures less," or enforcing the distinction between an austere and a liberal view of life. Something might well be said on that topic too. I might expatiate on the asceticism of the Catholic, on the other-worldliness of Protestant churches: I might enumerate a long list of outrages which Christianity, in one orthodox form or another, has committed against the natural instincts, the innocent enjoyments

of humanity. But I think that for the most part we have emerged from this phase of religious feeling, and that the lesson would be at once trite and inappropriate. We have no sympathy with any form of monastic self-maceration. We do not malign God's earthly goodness as a means of propitiating His favour in a heaven which He has wisely hidden from our view. We do not divide our days, our literature, our music, our occupations, into sacred and secular, except in so far as the distinction arises out of the nature of things, and is essential, not arbitrary—real, not formal. We do not even separate the world from the church, reserving for one all the pieties of life, banishing to the other all its frivolities. All this is so little our habit, that we may easily incur a danger of another kind in forgetting that if the supernatural always underlies and is interwoven with the natural world, and God knows no distinction of times and places, it cannot be so with us; that if we would find Him who is above us, we must lift up our hearts, and that we cannot escape dependence upon seasons and occasions. But apart from this controversy, which only touches the surface of things, is it true that the Church, with all its shortcomings, with all its sins, has been unfaithful to the noblest joys of humanity? I doubt whether the great saints would say so. It is something to be able to go to the theatre with a quiet conscience: to read books which are in the best sense good, on Sun-

days and week-days alike: to taste with a thankful enjoyment all the various pleasures of art: in a word, to feel that in the cultivation of the faculties which God has given us, we cannot run the risk of offending the Giver. But one who with much toil and patience and prayer, after a long struggle of self-discipline, with many helps of grace, with backslidings that cannot be counted, and faintings of heart innumerable, has yet reached the presence of God and lives in Him from day to day, always gathering inspiration from fresh effort, and going from strength to strength,—such an one will tell you that a more level, an easier, a less macerated life, can offer no such pure, poignant, rapturous joy as falls to his lot. Believe me, we who habitually walk on life's lower slopes do not understand the blessedness of the saints who stand upon its summits. Just now, in that awful visitation of pestilence which has devastated Spain, the Sisters of Charity have been dying in the hospitals like flies. They are poor ignorant women, I dare say: altogether outside the culture and science of this boastful nineteenth century: grovelling in gross religious superstitions, setting their faith on absurd legends and childish marvels. But they know not only how to die when death comes, but how to give their lives for suffering men. There is no lack of volunteers: when one brave soldier is stricken down, another steps into her place, and the ranks are always full. Do you think there

is no joy in dying for God, for Christ, for love, for duty? Would that I could rise to that height of self-surrender! Would that I were worthy of such a death!

It all rests upon a belief in the unspeakable wisdom and tenderness of God's love. The older I grow, the more deeply I meditate upon the mystery of religion, the more clearly I see that this is the root of the whole matter. Compared with the difference which this sets up, all other religious distinctions between men, no matter how apparently fundamental, are of slight importance. You may bring all doctrine to be tried by this touchstone, and learn thereby its claim to divide or unite men: all who love God, and who feel that God loves them, are on one side: *they* have grasped the substance, all else is in comparison but shadow. Nor let names deceive you: historical Christianity has deified Jesus, and men pour out before Christ, in no stinted measure, the love, the veneration, the devotion, which we think to be due only to the Father. But are the love, the veneration, the devotion, there? Are they freely offered to the best that the man knows, the homage of his soul to the Supreme Good? He is at one with the true worshippers, and the true worshippers are at one with him: we all lift up blind hands of aspiration: our best prayers are but inarticulate and stammering petitions: we worship we know not what, but something higher than

our highest, better than our best. I often think of that great word of Angelique Arnauld's and make it my own, though possibly not precisely in her sense: "I am of the church of all the saints, and all the saints are of my church." And the prerogative of the saints is to have a very real and constant sense of the great love of God: to be persuaded that to those who love God all things work together for good: in the strength of that faith to throw themselves, with utter self-surrender, into the battle which rages ever between good and evil: to meet weal and woe with equal courage: to live with joy, to die in peace.

I cannot dedicate this Church to the Divine Joy; for, first, you have committed no such function to me; and next, such a dedication might possibly turn out to be, as the swift years rolled by, only a profound and melancholy irony. For if you plodded on your dull and level way, achieving a success or a failure equally poor and common: if you bartered away the deep and wide things of the spiritual life for a mess of denominational pottage: if no sweet household saints were trained here, and no humble heroes went out hence to do battle against the world's wretchedness: if you were content without the rapture of self-surrender, and were unconscious of the bliss of giving all for God—what a mockery and a reproach would your name be! No, brethren and sisters, the true dedication of this Church lies not in any poor words

of mine, but in what you make it in the years that are to come. Yet it seems to me that if in a society that on the one hand is beginning to care little about religion, and on the other would believe if it could, yet cannot—and, being perplexed and troubled and feverish, feels a sadness creeping over it for which it cannot find a remedy—*you* are able to vindicate the courage, the cheerfulness, the joy of faith, you will do a great work for God and for humanity. I know that I am offering you a counsel of perfection. I too feel that life has not only its sharp pangs, its disabling privations, its blinding disappointments, but its long tracts of languor, and an abiding sense of insufficiency. How hard it is to keep its cheerful vigour unimpaired to the last, and to move as eagerly through the restricted circle of old age as once we expatiated within the boundless horizon of youth! But still, O friends and fellow-pilgrims, the key-note of the Christian life is not silent resignation, not even filial trust, but cheerful obedience, a joyous self-surrender to God's will, an eager struggle for the right, an exultant belief that better things are at hand. We are heirs of all the ages: no man can rob us of the past, and faith holds the future in fee. "All things are ours—whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come—all are ours: and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

And so my heart's desire and prayer for you are,

that you may have strength and courage and patience to enter upon your great inheritance; and that, as the years pass, this Church may be the spiritual home of many strong and joyful souls. Rejoice, I pray you, in the beautiful world in which God has given you to live: rejoice in the fatherly love which heaps up your lives with various blessing: rejoice in the Communion of Saints, whereof you have your part, and in him, the Chief of all saints, yet the Friend of all sinners too: rejoice in the ringing battle of duty, into which it behoves you to go down and quit yourselves like men: rejoice in the coming kingdom of God, which asks your toil, your patience and your prayer: rejoice in the love that sweetens your homes, and the larger hope which tells you that it cannot die! For in God Himself is joy, serene, unspeakable, unchangeable, eternal.

XII.

A Parable of Auvergne.

PSALM cxxxix. 14:

"Marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

I AM just come from a region of extinct volcanos. They rise in an irregular row from the central plain of France, itself no inconsiderable height above the sea; not standing shoulder to shoulder, and bound together by high passes, as mountains are wont to be, but each by itself, looking like the great earth-bubble that it is. They are smooth enough, quiet enough now, though to the geologist's eye their outline tells their whole story: the craters which once belched forth sulphurous flame and molten rock are lined with grass, and cattle graze peacefully on slopes from which every living thing fled in breathless terror. These volcanos have no written history. No record, no tradition, takes us back to the period of their activity. But the story is plain upon the surface of the

country. These great, bowl-shaped depressions which meet you on the mountain-top — these long ridges of lava, which have slowly flowed, with a gradually cooling stream, into the valleys below—these stretches of desolate, stony plain, which twenty centuries have not sufficed to restore to fertility—all tell their own tale. There must have been a time at which the most destructive forces of which our earth has any experience were in full play here; and whatever they found Auvergne, they left it a scorched and barren wilderness. And now it is, as it were, a parable of Nature's reparative force. It is a land of vineyard and of orchard, where you leave the meadows by the stream sides to climb among great walnuts and chestnuts; where almost every rood of land is carefully tilled, where almost every rood richly repays the labourer's toil. Enough remains of the original desolation to show how long, how gradual, has been the restorative process: the old lava-streams can be traced, through the cultivation which enshrouds them, from point to point: and the dead volcanos rear themselves into the sky, mute testimonies to a forgotten cataclysm. It is as if Nature said, with calm, majestic voice: Lo, I destroy, but I restore; my very catastrophes open a fresh era of life and growth; my desolations are sudden, far-reaching, complete; but to me centuries are nothing, and presently the land laughs with redoubled beauty.

This parable has more applications than one. Shall I give it an historical one, and find the analogue in human affairs of the fertility that girds the dead volcanos? It is not far to seek: not thousands of years, but just one hundred, have rolled away since the political volcano burst forth in France. Perhaps it is only now that some few candid historical students are beginning to see the Revolution in its true light: to those who witnessed it with living eyes, much more who felt the scorching touch of its lava, or were overwhelmed in its fiery ashes, it seemed a social convulsion wholly portentous, mournful, horrible. It levelled all established things with the ground. It swept away, as with a storm of fire, all ancient reverence and beauty. It destroyed what seemed to men to be the very foundations of life, and reduced all that was customary and seemly to a weltering chaos. It sprang, as it were, suddenly out of the earth: only one here and there—and they were derided as fanatics—had heard the low roar and trembling of warning; and when it had wrecked innumerable homes, when it had exacted an immeasurable sacrifice of life, it slowly passed away, leaving behind it, what? What your answer is will depend upon your knowledge of history in the real sense of the word: your power of passing by the romantic story of the great, to fix your attention upon the welfare and happiness of the multitude who have neither name nor record: your ability to pene-

trate beneath the often idle tale of political vicissitude, to the causes that really affect the fate of the people. And the France of to-day lives, grows, organizes itself, reaches forward to unseen possibilities, upon the lava-stream of the Revolution, as yet hardly cold. I do not pause to describe or to characterize it: I have my own opinion of the justifiableness of the Revolution, which is not that commonly held a century ago: nor can I help feeling the liveliest sympathy with a state of society which has at once passed beyond the recognition of hereditary rank, and made the peasant the owner of the soil which he tills. That is not my present theme. What I want to call your attention to is the rapidity with which, in human affairs too, all forces of reparation work. I suppose no country ever looked back upon a stormier century than France upon that which has now come to its close. It began in volcanic forces of revolution: then, like a resistless whirlwind, France swept over Europe: three times has her capital been in possession of the invader: again and again has civic war filled the streets of her great towns with blood. But the foundations of life stand sure: she is rich, prosperous, contented: men live within the bounds of well-assured liberties, which answer all their needs and aspirations: the vine-dresser peacefully gathers his grapes into the vat: the ploughman toils quietly along the furrow. And the lesson is, that the bases of society are not to be finally

destroyed even by the wildest violence, the bitterest malignity of men.

Geologists tell us—if, indeed, their most confident affirmations are more than apt conjecture—that the forces which we call volcanic are always seething together beneath the earth's quiet crust, and that at any moment, almost at any place, they may burst forth into sudden destruction. Is it not so with every human life? Who is safe from crushing misfortune, from overwhelming sorrow, from benumbing bereavement? In one sense, he is least safe who has the largest hold upon life, whose sympathies have the widest reach, whose argosies of love are upon many seas; but even when a man has striven to shut himself up in the narrowest and best-guarded citadel of selfish personality, he can secure for himself no immunity from shattering earthquake and fiery storm. Does he love himself only? On his own head alone falls the thunderbolt, and he is fain to sit among the potsherds without comfort and without love. And it is a peculiarity of the most fatal and complete shipwrecks of affection, that they always come upon us unawares. We are tilling life's peaceful surface in quiet expectation of a harvest: the sun is bright overhead: the seasons are following in their wonted order: the ground is firm beneath our feet—when a day that began with as much calm serenity as another, lands us at nightfall in bitterest anxiety, and, almost before a second has passed,

the light of life is darkened for us evermore. The breast on which we were wont to lay our head throbs no longer: the arm on which we leaned will never again sustain us. The firm earth sways beneath our feet, and the home of our affections topples into ruin: the lava-stream, fiery, irresistible, all-destroying, condemns the fields on which we have spent our toil to eternal barrenness.

And the first impulse in such a case—which is, alas! too common—is to feel and to declare the misfortune irremediable. There is nothing for it, we think, but to put up with the new landscape of life, scorched, blotted into hideous sterility, as it may be. Courage and patience may make the best of it, but cannot change it: the vineyards are covered up in ruin, the trees are burned and blackened trunks, the very streams have forgotten their courses and ceased their refreshing flow. We resent all consolation, which falls as with a hollow and empty sound upon our ears: especially we resent all consolation which whispers of the restorative magic of time, for in that there seems to lie a secret treason to the past, and a shameful forgetfulness of what was so sweet and good. But all the while God works in us, as He works where the hot ashes lie thickest, and the burning lava takes its furthest way through the plain. The grass and the fern root themselves in the interstices of the rock. A thousand wild weeds, content with scantiest sustenance

from mother earth, open their flowers to the sun, and shed their seeds, perishing to live again in a more luxuriant offspring. Among them the grasshopper leaps and sings, and the lizard flashes in the sun; the little birds find refuge; the hare crouches in her form; and the land is no longer lifeless. Then, as the long years roll slowly by, a nut, dropped into some fit seed-bed, grows into a mighty tree, and the shrubs climb and push beneath its shelter—till the massive growth attracts the bountiful rain, and another great force of nature is enlisted on the side of restoration. Last of all comes man, intent upon finishing for his own purposes the work that nature has begun; and slowly toiling, patiently waiting, his orchards clothe the valleys, his vineyards climb the slopes, his meadows smile by the brook-side, and what were once the ineffaceable scars upon the land need an educated eye to detect them. Shall I pursue the analogy into its detail? Shall I tell you how silently, how softly, that great angel of God whom we call Time does his ministering work upon a desolate life—not offering importunate consolations which would be indignantly refused, but letting new thoughts, new interests, new hopes, new affections, grow up round the ruins of the old, until the work is so far complete that the sorrowful soul itself takes heart of grace, and co-operates towards its successful issue? I do not know whether, after all, the new world is as bright, as luxuriant, as the old. Its fiery scars

are never quite hidden. You can trace the course of the lava-streams through the vegetation that hides and adorns them. But it is at all events a world in which it is possible to till the soil and lift up hands of gratitude to God.

It is strange to see how, in the country of which I am speaking, the lava-streams have blocked up the water-courses. Naturally, the slowly moving mass of molten rock has taken the line of the valleys in which the little brooks ran among the hills, and, as it cooled, has closed up the waters in a prison through which they could not break. But nature and time, working together, will not be denied; and at the lava's furthest edge, where it had grown so cool that it could flow no longer, and hung, a shapeless cliff, over the plain that it had threatened, the water now wells up in springs, copious, limpid, cold, taking their rejoicing way through the meadows, and spreading verdure around them on every side. Again I saw a parable of human sorrow. A crushing grief is a searing and a scorching thing: it dries up a man's heart within him: the springs of natural affection cease to flow: the one outlet of love absolutely barred, it seems as if no other were worth a thought. It is very hard for sorrow not to be selfish: its very characteristic is, that it cannot for a moment forget or escape from self, and that remembrance is one dull consciousness of pain, one abiding blackness of despair. But I think that in almost every case—often

without our own co-operation, sometimes even against our will—the springs break forth. They have been running underground all the while, though we knew it not, and preparing for us a refreshment which we were not ready to welcome. Some renewed sense of the beauty and mystery of nature, which restores to our imprisoned spirit its communion with the All of things: more efficacious still, some demand of dutiful self-sacrifice, which, at first hardly answered, wakes at last a fresh outflow of love: some impulse of pity, which takes us out of the isolation of our own grief into the great fellowship of all suffering souls—these are the clear, cold waters which restore verdure and fertility to life. It is as if Love came and touched with healing hand the wounds which its own shaft had inflicted.

And yet there are exceptions, real or apparent, to every rule. I saw strange, stony tracts on which it seemed as if the restorative forces of nature had spent themselves in vain. Huge blocks of lava lay about, encumbering the earth, around which the scantiest herbage hardly grew: the soil would not support bush or tree: strange insects crawled or flitted over the surface, as if some remnant of the old primeval fire still glowed beneath. At least two thousand years have passed since those fires were extinguished, and still their work of destruction is not repaired: as if to show what tortures she once suffered, Earth bears her

scars yet. And these islands of obstinate sterility in a sea of fruitfulness made me think of the irremediable wound which a great, shameful sin may inflict upon a human life. I do not know that the precise case to which I refer is one that often comes under our notice. Tree and fruit are for the most part of one stock: a wicked deed comes out of a wicked life, and therefore stands in no strong contrast with it: for the awakening of the moral consciousness, it is necessary that a man should feel, not that he has been like himself, but infinitely worse and meaner than himself. Murder does not mean much to one who always lives on the verge of homicide; and a trader who recoils before no sharp practice has no real horror of what the law calls swindling. But sometimes there is a great blot on what has been before, and will be again, a life really struggling towards goodness—some sudden yielding to overmastering temptation, some self-surrender to a blind whirlwind of passion, some cardinal choice in life deliberately made, yet seen as soon as made, and ever after, to have been a treachery to duty and to God. The sin may be all unknown to men, or, if known, such as common opinion would lightly judge; but it burns itself into the conscience, it remains a waste and barren spot in memory, which no sweet growths will hide; and even time, all-conquering time, cannot make it other than it is, an abomination of desolation. And yet, O brethren in weakness and in

sin, courage and patience! What are a few short years to those who have eternity before them? Sun and rain, frost and snow, will yet disintegrate the rock, however slowly: already the grass is beginning to push, already the flowers to bloom: courage, I say, and patience: if only we submit ourselves to God's husbandry, it yet lies within the compass of His marvellous methods to make the wilderness of our sins the very garden of our souls!

One more analogy, and I have done. In some parts of this strange country the volcanic forces have taken other forms and produced other effects. Through the superincumbent strata they have pushed up huge, isolated rocks, which tower, pillar-like, into the sky, crowned sometimes with church or castle, but always standing out into the landscape with a kind of intrusive distinctness, as if they belonged to another order of things. Ages pass and leave their iron rigidity untouched: some scanty vegetation roots itself in their crannies, the yellow lichen overspreads their cliffs with a golden glow: but the frost touches them not, nor the rain, and the wind howls about them with only an impotent rage. Nay, what process of disintegration goes on attacks only the softer strata at their base; so that, as the ages pass, they seem to grow in height and steadfastness, and to rear themselves ever more proudly over the puny works of men below. Do they not bring to mind the few great human personalities which no

time, no change of opinion, no progress of knowledge, can dwarf? And as I gazed upon one, shooting up hundreds of feet into the southern blue, and crowned with a church dedicated to the archangel who loves all sudden heights, do you wonder that my thoughts turned, full of admiring love, to the greatest of all human personalities, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever"?

My parable is ended: do not reject it, I pray you as if it were frivolous or had no grave significance. For to those who have the inner vision, all nature is a parable always:

> Two worlds are ours—'tis only sin
> Forbids us to descry
> The mystic heaven and earth within,
> Plain as the sea and sky.

XIII.

All Saints' Day.

EPHESIANS ii. 19:

"Fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

TO-DAY is dedicated, in the calendars both of the Catholic and Anglican Church, to the commemoration of "all saints." The phrase has a fine sound of breadth and liberality about it, as if the festival were intended to bring into one view all various types of human holiness, irrespective of differences of faith or diversities of manifestation, and to make them an occasion of rejoicing and gratitude to God. I think, however, that the commemoration must be admitted to have had a humbler origin. It began when, in the year 610, Pope Boniface IV. gathered together from the Roman Catacombs the remains of many nameless saints and martyrs, and, enshrining them in that stately relic of pagan antiquity which we still know as the Pantheon, re-dedicated it to

Christian worship. Perhaps, as time went on, the idea took possession of pious minds, that if any pure and sweet spirit, any brave but obscure witness for God, had been passed over in the Church's calendar, it might be fitly remembered in this one comprehensive commemoration. At all events it is true that the Latin Church approaches the celebration of this festival in a truly catholic spirit. The hymn which the Breviary assigns to the day is wide in its range of invocation: it begins with Christ and the Virgin Mother: it goes on to include apostles and prophets, martyrs, virgins, confessors: it binds together in one the living and the dead. And in this it accords with the clause in the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in the Communion of Saints," which does not appear in that Confession till at least the sixth century. For the phrase has a more specific meaning than that which we commonly put upon it: it was intended to indicate a real unity and intercommunion between the militant and the triumphant Church: between Christians still tempted, toiling, struggling here below, and those who, above, are at rest in the bosom of God, beyond reach of sin and sorrow. So that if to-day, of all days, we claim to be "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God," we not only affirm in the most practical way the majestic unity of the Church which underlies and transcends all differences, but ask admittance to a communion which is as wide as God's

dealings with mankind, and stretches from the Son, who lies in the very bosom of the Father, to the humblest of those little ones who try to follow him with their whole heart.

What is it to be a Saint? Perhaps as the world rolls on, and there is a greater revulsion from a too ecclesiastical idea of goodness, the word has begun to lose something of its power of expressing the highest ideal of manliness: and when society is summarily divided into saints and sinners, a healthy moral sympathy is not wholly with the former. But I am going to disregard this: I shall take the word as I think Christ and Paul would have taken it. Saint is "sanctus," and "sanctus" means holy: what, then, is the root-idea of holiness? I think I cannot be mistaken in assuming a very close and essential connection between holiness and religious faith. There are types of human goodness, strong, serene, consummate, beautiful, in which this connection is not manifest: as, for instance, the Stoicism of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius. You know what I think of that, and how I look upon the books in which it is preserved as among the most precious possessions of the human race. But neither of these admirable men had any faith in God that was not of the vaguest and cloudiest kind: when by chance they speak of the gods, it is as if it were a fashion of speech, from which they did not choose wholly to break away. There is no gleam

from heaven on their page: there is no consciousness of being beset, behind and before, by a Power not only stronger but wiser and kinder than themselves: what we see is a noble and resolved humanity, trying to make itself equal to its fate. And therefore, though I may be wrong, it is only by an arbitrary extension of the term Saint that I could apply it to them: I should have to call them Philosophic Saints, or Pagan Saints, to distinguish the quality of their goodness. For holiness differs from virtue, from goodness, from excellence, from any other word which denotes an approach to human perfectness, precisely in this, that it tacitly involves the relation of the soul to a living God. It implies an awful shrinking from all things evil, because God is good: an eager effort to go from strength to strength, because God is perfect: an outflow of love to man that knows no bounds of self-surrender, because God's love is infinite: and with all this, surrounding it as it were with an atmosphere, and giving life its whole tone and colour, an unceasing consciousness of the Divine presence and help. So the true Saint lives with and for and in God. His highest wisdom is obedience. His best strength is trust. There is a supernatural element in all his life. He cannot sink, for beneath him are the Everlasting Arms; and when he soars, it is in the might of the Spirit of God.

The Catholic conception of Saintliness, and to some extent the Protestant conception too, certainly in-

cludes the idea of self-maceration. The ascetic element, which is always ready to intrude itself into religiousness, did not long spare Christianity: indeed, if we may trust some hostile critics, was in it from the very first. And from the time the monk appeared upon the scene, there was something monastic in all saintliness. The substitution of prayer for work, or, if work were still deemed necessary, its withdrawal from the stir and competition of human interests: the subjection of the body by fasts and vigils—if need be, by cruel self-discipline: the renunciation of natural affections and domestic ties: so austere a preparation for death as to make existence little more than a death in life,—all these things came to be considered as the only way of holiness, the single method by which the Christian character could be built up and sustained. And even among those Protestants who are the farthest from understanding and appreciating the Catholic ideal, the Saint is never on good terms with the world. There are books which he will not read, amusements in which he will not join, aspirations which he thinks futile, occupations which he brands as frivolous. He lives a life apart; and, snatching a brand from the burning now and then, sees without despair humanity roll on its careless way to perdition. And yet when I turn to the example of the great Master of Saintliness, I find no trace of this other-worldliness. He was as ready to sit at rich men's feasts as to share the

cottage of the poor. I see no evidence of his having separated himself from the common life and worship of his people. It was a part of his nature, so to speak, to keep himself in touch with the degraded and the fallen. The feeling of humanity—simple, bare, humanity—was too strong in him that he should cut himself off from any class of men, or fall into the Pharisaic error of going into a sect apart. Christ—I do not hesitate to say it—was of the world, and meant his kingdom of God to be realized in the world; and the true transforming power of the gospel upon society is not from without but from within. Shall I startle you if I say that Paul was, in the best sense of the word, a man of the world, who, moved by the instincts of a Christian gentleman, made himself all things to all men, if by any means he might win some: was full of the culture of his time, and had a heart that beat in accord with the various life of the motley society into which he endeavoured to breathe a fresh spirit? So if on this side your conception of Saintliness be narrow, I pray you to enlarge it. Holiness does not involve self-maceration, or retirement from the world, or concentration upon one's own salvation, or a lofty indifference to what common men love and hate. I do not desire to derogate from the beauty of the saints who dwell apart, but I love more those who come down to live the life of God in the throng of men. Is goodness with them the main thing? Is it goodness

for God's sake and because God is good? Does the air of heaven accompany them wherever they are and whatever they do? Then are they, whether or no they bear external marks of holiness which common eyes can recognize, "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

One of the saddest things in a world that is often sad is, that God's saints so seldom recognize each other, at least across the dividing walls of churches and systems. It is so much easier to discern a monk than to know a soul. The shaven head, the sandaled feet, the symbolic garb, the haggard countenance—these are easy to recognize: prayers can be numbered, penances and pilgrimages speak for themselves. I do not say that true Saintliness is inconsistent with these evident tokens, or others of a more Protestant complexion; but only that the tokens are too usually accepted for the reality, and may be so accepted when it is absent. No evangelical saint could possibly meet with Catholic appreciation, nor would perhaps care for it. We ourselves do not enter heartily into the kind of holiness which is indisputably produced by a belief in the Atonement; and I need hardly say that orthodox Christians find Unitarian goodness lacking in warmth and unction. But if in any way this age of ours, which is so constantly dwelling on its own religious difficulties and shortcomings, is rising into a higher region of faith, it is in the growing recognition

of the fact that there is in essence but one type of human goodness, and that that consists in likeness to God. Just in proportion as a man loves God, and is like God, does he emerge into an upper air, where the divisions between churches do not run, and the noise of controversy cannot penetrate. We can see it in the writings of the truly great saints: a part, it is true, is given up to the differences which they thought important and the disputes in which they took a share; but there is another part in which they speak but one language, utter the same truths, breathe the same aspirations. Channing is one with Augustine there; George Fox sees eye to eye with Pascal. We sometimes say that all controversies will be laid to rest in heaven, where, to their mutual surprise, orthodox doctor and heresiarch will find themselves side by side. What is this but a blind and imperfect anticipation of the judgment of God, who, Himself omniscient, notes our feeble attempts to comprehend the infinite reality of things, and estimates us, not by our conquest of truth, but by our struggle for goodness?

I greatly dislike the idea involved in the Catholic canonization of Saints, and am glad to take refuge from it in the comprehensive commemoration of to-day, which I can make as wide as my own knowledge and sympathy will let me. One easily brushes aside the notion that any ecclesiastical organization has the right to decide who are Saints and who are not: if the

theory itself were not absurd, its practical results would be enough to ensure its rejection. But I cannot allow that it is right or possible to draw the sharp dividing-line which this process contemplates. When I say, as I do with a very real love and faith, "I believe in the Communion of Saints," I am thinking not only of those bright and supreme spirits to whom universal Christendom offers its homage, but of the struggling souls outside of any charmed interior circle, who yet look to be strengthened and cheered and drawn upward by contact with those who are stronger and better than themselves. There are infinite gradations in holiness, from the first faint stirring in the soul of love for God and goodness, to the conscious, complete, successful devotion of a life to the highest ends of living; but all are bound together and made one by that breath of the Holy Spirit which is their single strength. To whom does the neophyte, who is as yet only beginning to try his untrained powers, so eagerly, so hopefully look up, as to the elder brother who has passed through his temptations, who has conquered his weakness, and who, though still tempted, still weak, is pressing forward to fresh achievements? Who regard with such peculiar and helpful tenderness the toils and efforts of beginners with God, as those who have made most ample trial of His goodness and drunk deepest of His inexhaustible grace? And if this be so, there is no presumption involved in the

claim to be "fellow-citizens with the saints." The moment I really begin to love God, and to try to be like God, I am on their side, and can claim whatever help and inspiration they have to give. If, to feel the strength and brightness of the Communion of Saints, a consummate holiness, a perfect walk with God, a complete self-surrender, were necessary, what would be left for us, tempted and wayworn and wounded as we are, but to stand, silent and sad, in the outer darkness?

And so this great word, the "Communion of Saints," becomes wider the longer we think of it and the more we penetrate into its real meaning. I do not draw back from the assertion that faith in God is of the essence of Saintliness, as that idea has gradually taken shape in men's minds during the last eighteen centuries; but could Christ have seen Epictetus in the flesh, would he not have taken him by the hand as a true son of God, even though he had never found his Father's face? There are sides of our humanity on which we must needs acknowledge our kindred with the great philosophic Emperor; and if I were to pray to saints at all, I could join in Erasmus' half-serious invocation, "Sancte Socrate, ora pro nobis!" But, on another side, the thought which I have laid before you unites us, with many good men and women of a sweet and strong every-day goodness, in a very wide and noble fellowship. One or two saints I have known in my lifetime, men of such a pervading holiness, of such

rounded achievement, as to silence all ethical criticism in affectionate admiration; but many, many more whom I felt to be better than myself, who were strong when I was weak, serene when I was perturbed, self-forgetting when I remembered myself. It is an unhappy family that has not some household saints all its own, whose goodness perhaps has been hidden from the world, or which the world has only imperfectly understood, but whose memory, to the chosen few, "smells sweet and blossoms in the dust." For, on the one hand, there is a kind of holiness which bears most fruit in quiet places; and, on the other, holiness finds in love its quickest and surest interpreter. Consult your own memories if you would know what I mean: I am persuaded that you will not consult them in vain. Those venerable and beautiful forms that are silently rising up before you now, instinct with a sweetness which you alone can fully see, and bringing with them tender recollections in which the best part of your lives is bound up—these are the link which unites you with the Communion of Saints, and gives you courage to believe that you too may be of the household of God.

And lastly, if there be any bridge by which, in thought and love, we can cross the silent river which flows between the living and the dead, it is built for us by this word, "I believe in the Communion of Saints." Intercession of Saints! I have no warrant

for believing it: it is only dimly, and as in a vision, that I can picture to myself the heavenly courts, and guess the moods and occupations of those who tread them. But there is a sense in which even this most Catholic of all beliefs comes home to my heart: if there were those who, here below, remembered me in their prayers and held me up in their hands before God, shall I believe that now they love me less, or that He turns a deaf ear to their pleadings? For whatever be the circumstances of that heavenly life for which we look, there can be no doubt as to its essence: love cannot change, duty is one and the same, the service of God knows no variation. It is but a metaphor, born of human weakness of conception, to say that we shall find our heavenly occupation in one Eternal Anthem: a metaphor, again, the saying of the great French divine, that the celestial praise cannot be other than one rapt silence. I think—with all reverence be it spoken—that heaven would hardly be heaven to me if I were bidden to forget and never more regard the fate of those whom I had loved, of those whom I had helped, of those with whom I had struggled shoulder to shoulder: and so I too look up, mindful of fathers and friends who are gone before, and trust that they remember me. And into what a noble company does not our mutual love give me admittance! Christ, first-born of many brethren: the prophets who hoped for him: the apostles who helped him: the confessors

who witnessed for him: the martyrs who died for him: the deep thinkers who have made his mysteries plain: the sweet singers whose winged words still bear our spirits upwards to God: strong and white souls innumerable who have toiled and prayed for the kingdom: patriots who have given their all for right and liberty: sages who have found at last the truth which they sought so painfully: little children, transplanted early that they might grow up in the very garden of God,—all, in their place and degree, loving, serving, adoring, the Eternal Holiness! Which of us is worthy of so noble a companionship, or how shall we grow into the glory of so great a hope?

XIV.

The Dayspring from on High.

LUKE i. 78:

"Whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us."

I KNOW no literary fact more interesting, and in a sense more pathetic, than those late blossoms of Hebrew poetry, the "Benedictus" and the "Magnificat." Beyond the story which Luke alone of the Evangelists tells, we know nothing of their origin. In language, of course, they are Greek; but Hebrew in their conception, their form, their metrical structure. It is difficult to say to how late a period the book of Psalms, that great national hymn-book of the Jews, remained open to fresh contributions: the fact has been long recognized that, so far from belonging only to the kingly and prophetic period, it covers the whole history and answers to all the religious development of the people. Had we met with these two little poems among the Psalms, we should have

felt no sense of incongruity: all we should have noted would have been a certain precision of personal allusion which we do not find in older utterances. There is a well-known connection in the history of literature between signal national events and achievements and the outbreak of poetic inspiration: the splendid literary periods of Pericles, of Augustus, of Elizabeth, of Louis Quatorze, are times at which the nations too felt the thrill of a great destiny, and interposed decisively in the affairs of the world. So the spirit of Hebrew poetry that had been long asleep, woke once more at the cradle of the Christ: and the voice of the Psalmist was heard for the last time as the promise of prophecy was being fulfilled in the announcement of the Gospel.

"The dayspring from on high." We owe this beautiful phrase to the genius of William Tyndale, the martyr-scholar, whose labours are the firm foundation of the English Bible. Wiclif, in 1380, has "the springing up from on high," which is a very literal translation; Tyndale, in 1534, made it "the dayspring from on high;" and all subsequent translators have had the good taste to follow his example. I figure to myself humanity in the guise of a traveller toiling through a long night along a difficult road. It is hard to find the way: real obstacles are made more real by the darkness, which at the same time creates a thousand imaginary terrors. In the silence and solitude of night

the journey lengthens: and the fancy grows painfully busy with the goal which it is desired to reach and the welcome which is waiting. Beneath the stars' cold light the landscape lies asleep: if any life stirs, it is that of some obscure beast which stealthily snatches its prey when other living things are off their guard. And it grows colder as the night wears on, as the sense of solitude deepens, and weariness creeps more prevailingly over eye and limb: till it seems coldest and darkest of all just when darkness is about to give way to light. For see, there is a pale grey stealing over the eastern heavens, which presently puts on a rosy flush: a faint twitter of awakening birds makes itself heard, and harmless living things begin to move through the twilight. And then, little by little, a strange pomp of colour invades the sky: clouds which but now reflected the moon's silvery radiance, glow with crimson splendour: and between the bars of purple are depths of pale, translucent green: and every moment the pageant changes, being transfigured from glory to glory. Then, as light once more floods the earth, it seems as if Nature awoke to greet it: the birds' song grows more joyous: the dew-drops glitter on every blade of grass: the flowers timidly unfold their petals to the coming sun: from cottage chimneys rises the light blue smoke, which announces the re-awakening life of man. Last of all, the glory fades away, as the sun himself, strong, bright, joyous

in the plenitude of his power, rises above the horizon, and with his level rays infuses warmth into the cool sweet air, and gives the promise of a glorious morn. And for the traveller, whose way is now clear before him, dangers have vanished and toil seems light: there is a hum of friendly voices round about him, and he presses forward cheerfully to home and rest. "The dayspring from on high hath visited him."

These words must have been very true to the feelings of those "poor in spirit" to whom in the first instance Christ came, and who must have given him his earliest welcome. For though there was much misery in Palestine in that age, a large part of it was unconscious, and therefore not on the quest of a remedy. It is always so in times of fierce political and social excitement: when passion has free range, and scruples are crushed into silence: when men have come to believe that personal ambition is the all-prevailing law of life, and that, in comparison with a desire gratified, others' welfare, others' happiness, are of small account. In such a whirl of excited interests, even patriotism becomes fanaticism, and religion formal bigotry: the very virtues of humanity are exaggerated into vices, and all its sweet juices fermented into poison. I cannot convey to you in a few words the impression which the story of that sad and shameful time makes upon the impartial student: it is all summed up in the suggestion that the demoniacs who seem to fill

the pages of the Evangelists were the wrecks of its unbridled passions, the victims of its cold cruelties. But there were some, of whom aged Simeon and pious Anna are the recorded types—nor haunters of the temple courts alone, but simple dwellers among the Galilean hills, or shepherds tending their flocks, like father Abraham, in the silent wilderness beyond Jordan, or merchants, perchance, cherishing their quiet hope where Egypt filled Alexandria with trade, or the Aventine Hill looked down upon yellow Tiber—there were some whose thoughts were much with prophets and their yet unfulfilled hopes: who longed for a re-opened communication between earth and heaven, and desired, above all things, that God should once more visit His people. There are such in all ages, pure and collected spirits, self-withdrawn from the coarser interests and baser struggles of humanity, to whom it is always the chief thing that God should speak and men should listen, because they know that in such speech and such hearing is enfolded all the secret of life. Strength is what they want, and patience and peace: a sense of harmony with the Divine Force which vivifies and regulates the all of things: in themselves, an ordered government answering to the fixed rule without: and for all human wretchedness and wrong, a hope of better things to come. And if we are to suppose that this song really broke from the lips of Zacharias, it was the voice of

a hope so great as to have become prophetic. The darkness and the chill that had overspread human life were flying away, and men were visited once more by "the dayspring from on high."

With us it has been so long one unbroken day, we are so used to the sun's warmth and light, as possibly to have lost something of our grateful surprise at the "dayspring." We grow accustomed to what are at once life's commonest and greatest blessings, and come to think of them as conditions of existence involved in the very right to live. How seldom do we remember to thank God for fresh air and running waters, for the nourishment of food and the recreation of sleep! So in the spiritual world it is only too easy to degrade "the dayspring from on high" into "the light of common day;" and not only to lose the sense that it radiates from the throne of God, but to find fault with its illuminating and vivifying power. There are dark places, we think, which it leaves dark. There are mysteries into which it does not help us to penetrate. There are stony tracts of life on which not even its kindling warmth will persuade the grass to grow. There are death-like chills of the heart which will not be dissipated at its touch. How many thousands are saying just now that the nineteenth century is finding out to be a delusion what eighteen centuries before have acclaimed as the very light of life; and that the world can do very well without principles that

cannot prove a divine origin, and truths that human progress is rendering obsolete! Or, to put it in another way, the old riddle of existence remains, but Christianity is no longer admitted to have furnished the answer to it: men must try to live their lives in a new way, and to work out their fate on lines which they have themselves chosen. For myself, if round my soul the twilight should gather and the night again darken, I cannot doubt what the ultimate result will be. Happy for us, my brethren, if we can abide in it, or even attain to it, without so mournful an experience! For here, as we are gathered together at Christmas-tide to give utterance to the joy and gratitude which fill our hearts: now, with the spiritual experience of another year, with all its troubles and its trials behind us: in loving recollection of our fathers who have died in the faith, and with the children round about us to whom we trust it will be an inspiration—we turn to Christ with fresh affection as the dayspring from on high, which, through the tender mercy of our God, hath visited us, and are content alike with the splendour of his dawning and the glory of his perfect day.

But there is a night of our own preparing. We can make darkness at mid-day if we will. We have only of set purpose to turn our backs upon the bountiful Sun, and straightway it will be night, in which all the beasts of the forest do creep forth, and ravage and lay

waste the soul. Nay, I might even ask whether it is ever complete and glorious day with any of us: no cloud of sin to hide the face of God, no mist of distrust to intercept the warmth of His love, no grey overhanging canopy of indifference to shut out from us the blessed infinity of heaven? But it is when we plunge into conscious and deliberate transgression: when we choose to live a lower life than the best within our reach: when, ceasing to struggle with an overmastering temptation, we own its strength and our own weakness—that the twilight settles upon our souls, soon to deepen into night. I will not say in how few cases it is that no gleam of day ever returns: perhaps the twilight of cold worldliness is less often visited by the ray than even the black night of passionate crime. But as one who has passed, and may still have to pass, through periods of darkness and of chill—alas! self-evolved—speaking to men and women of like experience, I must needs point out that it is when we have emerged from them that we best discern the divineness of the day. Sin! cry the new theorists upon human life—sin! it is only a theologian's figment: we do but miss our way, and strive to find it again as soon as may be. Indifference, ingratitude, distrust—these are emotions which we feel towards a person, and the universe reveals no Divine Person, but only a changeless Law. Ah! whatever may be the intellectual relation of Christianity to the

mysteries of creation and providence, it is truer to human nature than that: as to the darkness of the sinful soul, the chill of the sluggish heart, there can be no mistake. And it is when, by help of the outstretched hand of Christ, we are escaping from them: when we believe him that our banishment from the light and warmth of the universe is our own act, and that God is always waiting to be gracious, that we realize most completely that the dayspring which sends us on our way rejoicing is really from on high.

It is the same with the night of our sorrow, though not quite in the same way. We do not make it for ourselves: it comes upon us as a catastrophe, like the sudden darkening of the sun at mid-day. It is a blow from without, striking at our tenderest part: we are overborne by an irresistible force, to which our own will gives no consent. And upon that night, only this dayspring can arise: there is no other. All newer forms of practical philosophy agree in confessing their impotence to deal with this, which is nevertheless an integral part of human life, and always will be. No cunning re-organization of society will improve death out of the world, or prevent the smart of loss, or provide that hearts shall not be broken. And without Christ, what comfort? To say that loss is common to the race, only leaves the wound more widely gaping than before: love will not take loss into its account, and asks to be enabled to defy it. To make the best

of what we have had and to be content, is another cold precept: true love is infinite, and, till unfaith has clipped its wings, mocks at limitations of earth and time. So before the heart's sorrow our new reading of life is confessedly inadequate: if the sun withdraws himself, there is nothing for it but to get used to darkness as best we may, till death plunges us into the night which knows no dawn. But if all the while we are able to feel that we are in the hands of a Divine Compassion, as well as compassed about by immovable Law: if in the very crisis of our agony we never lose our grasp of a helping hand, and always have a heart on which to lean our aching head: if through the cold solitude of bereavement pierces a quiet voice, "In my Father's house are many mansions; I go to prepare a place for you," we believe in the return of the light—we can lift up our souls towards the dayspring.

So in regard to the unbelief which is certainly making way amongst us, I look to the darkness to convince men of the beauty and the glory of the light. That we were made for the light and not for the darkness, I have never been more profoundly convinced than now. And I think that even amidst our unbelief, which is largely a phase of intellectual honesty and scrupulosity, men are rapidly coming to be of the same opinion. You cannot explain sin out of existence, or water down remorse into a mere acknowledg-

ment of intellectual error, or reduce the consciousness of having offended against an infinite law of right to the recognition of a miscalculation of prudential expediences. Sorrow will have to be borne—and that can hardly be unless it is also explained: an age which is eagerly striving to penetrate the most recondite secrets of matter, will scarcely consent to remain in ignorance of the daily mysteries of the soul. Life must be lived: if not with divine helps and leadings, then in the strength of the natural man, and with no outlook beyond his three-score years and ten. Already I see one result of this great experiment: in many fine and ardent spirits an eager wish to believe—even, so far as it is consistent with honesty, a resolution to live on the footing of belief, to strive that existence shall lose no element of nobleness of which it is capable, to shut the window to no light that may come from any quarter of the heavens. Men and women who feel thus are "the poor in spirit" of our questioning and philosophical age: and it would be faithlessness to God to believe that they will long and wait in vain. But I look upon it that the deliberate attempt which others make to live without a living God will end in failure. I do not believe that noble life can be sustained on such conditions through many generations. And those whom darkness slowly enwraps, and who come to feel at last the chill depression of the night, will learn to welcome that dayspring from

on high in which simpler souls have long unfeignedly rejoiced.

We are all, thank God, simple souls to-day. Children of the common Father, we gather at the cradle of the child Christ. The spirit of Hebrew poetry is once more vocal round about it, and a still stronger, sweeter strain seems to fall upon it as if from heaven: Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. To-day at least we will not dwell on the corruptions of faith, the weaknesses of the Church, the disappointments of Christianity: when the divine descends to mingle with the human, it must needs partake of its failures and limitations. It is enough for us to know that we too have sat in darkness and the shadow of death, and that the dayspring from on high has guided our feet into the way of peace. In some incomplete and intermittent fashion we have been set free from the thraldom of our sins. In proportion as we have trusted God's love, we have emerged from the night of our sorrows. Whenever we have been brave enough to follow in our Master's steps, our restless passions have been hushed in peace. And therefore, like the wise men of old, we bring our homage of mystic gold and frankincense and myrrh: gold for his royalty, for he is our king: frankincense for his priesthood, for he presents us before God: myrrh for his burial, because his death has been our life.

XV.

Self.

GALATIANS vi. 2, 5:

"Bear ye one another's burthens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. . . . . For every man shall bear his own burthen."

I HAVE chosen to speak of these contradictory verses to-day because of their contradiction. The writings of Paul abound in statements which are more or less paradoxical; but I do not know of another instance in which he so boldly and directly lays down an important religious principle, and then straightway sets beside it another which seems to be its antithesis. It all comes, I think, from his resolute determination to be true to facts of human nature as he was able to see them: of his refusal to make those facts fit into a logical system in which they did not spontaneously find a place. If there are unresolved contradictions in life, if character is the result of opposite and irreconcilable forces, if facts of existence take

a different aspect according as they are looked at from different sides, why not say so? It is better to admit the contradictions than to force them into an artificial accord: once they are clearly seen and understood, there may be some hope of discovering a reconciling principle. So in this case. The denial, the abandonment, the forgetfulness of self is a fundamental law of the Christian life. When Paul says, "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts," he lays down the first maxim of the counsel of perfection; and from this beginning the true disciple goes on into the enjoyment of the larger life of sympathy, feeling others' joys sweeter, others' sorrows sharper, than his own, till finally the motions of his will are in complete accord with the Divine purpose, and he loses himself in the sense of a more stable Strength, a more comprehensive Wisdom, a more vivid Personality. But, on the other hand, it is equally true that self will not be denied, abandoned, forgotten. The consciousness of personality is the strongest, the most inalienable thing about us. We cannot go back in memory to a period when it was not with us, and we know that it will accompany us to the very gates of death. Not the completest, the most absolute, the most self-denying love that ever united two human souls can abrogate it: each one of us is a separate island of existence: between those that are nearest and dearest flows ever "the unplumbed,

salt, estranging sea." How are these things to be reconciled?

Recollect, to begin with, that there must be a self to give up self. Nor is this quite the truism that it may seem to be at first hearing. One of the chief demands which we make upon a man is, that he shall be himself, and not the plaything of another's will, the puppet of another's purpose. Whatever metaphysicians may say, all our common language, all our ordinary moral judgments, go upon the supposition that every human life is a centre of original force; and we base our estimate of it on the energy, the constancy, the consistency, with which that force is directed. Or, again, every human character has an individuality of its own, a mixture of qualities and faculties not quite like any other: to use common religious metaphors, a place to fill, a work to do. And so long as a life does not overpass the line which separates the strength of individuality from the exaggeration and the weakness of eccentricity, we ask of it to be itself, to make its own contribution to the sum of existence, to preserve its centre of vital force quick, vivid, operative. So we do not apply terms of moral praise—unselfish, self-denying, self-forgetting—to those weak and plastic spirits who, incapable of the effort of self-abnegation, yield to superior force of will, are tossed hither and thither by circumstance, and give up the citadel of their personality to any resolute assault. We feel a

certain difference, which from the moral point of view is all-important, between succumbing to a force which we are not strong enough to resist, and voluntary surrender of ourselves to an impulse which manifestly comes from a nobler plane of being. In short, strange as the paradox may sound, the more of self there is in self-surrender, the more highly we estimate it.

But self-surrender to what? May not the secret of which we are in search lie in the answer to this question? A thousand forces beat upon a man, some arising from without, some from within, but all attacking that central focus of personality which we call himself. I am not called upon to speak of these things with metaphysical exactness, or to accommodate my words to any received system of psychology; it is enough that my meaning is clear. Which of them must he resist? At what point can he yield without loss of dignity and self-respect? What are we to say of what are commonly called temptations? Is there anything in common, for instance, between the solicitations of self-indulgence, and the overwhelming influence of passion, and the slow operation of combined forces which draw us after a multitude to do evil? Surely this: that they lessen the energy and degrade the quality of our personality. When we have given way to them, we are less ourselves than we were before. We have parted with some portion of our self-control. We are not so completely our own mas-

ters. We yield more readily to the next solicitation of self-indulgence: passion finds in us an easier victim: we have a greater difficulty than we had in setting conscience against the common opinion. Resistance to these forces is felt to be in the line of self-development: every victory over them leaves us stronger, rounder, more self-poised. But now another attack is made upon our personality by forces of a quite different kind: it is no longer a question of not indulging, but of denying ourselves: we are asked, not to refrain from doubtful, but to give up innocent pleasures: we are invited to transfer the focus of our personality from the narrow ground of our own delight and advantage to the broader field of the common good; and in the grandeur of this wider horizon to allow the self which is so near, which appears to us so great, which reveals itself as so important, to fade into insignificance. It is pity that pleads: it is love that reasons with us: it is the enthusiasm of humanity that would bear us away: it is the All that seeks to prevail against the One. And then, if only we have discernment, we find that at this point the law of the development of self is, as it were, reversed: that we live by yielding, we grow by self-abandonment, we become strong by self-forgetfulness. Think, now: does a man's character suffer, either in itself or in the esteem of the wise and good, by this kind of self-surrender? You pity the poor, weak will that cannot

hold itself four-square against temptation: you have a feeling of contempt for the unstable intellect that is tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine. But the woman who cannot defend her own happiness if those whom she is bound to love and protect demand its sacrifice: the man who will give up some long-cherished scheme of ambition because a near, common, unexpected duty suddenly lays claim to him: the patriot who holds not his very life his own if his country ask it of him—these you dare not think weak, or traitors to their better selves. They have found the true line of growth: they can go from strength to strength. Every sacrifice they make renders them more masters of themselves. Only when they have denuded themselves of all that they can call their own, do they enter into the full inheritance of their humanity.

There are three successive stages of this development — self-denial, unselfishness, self-forgetfulness. And each of the three has moral peculiarities of its own.

The first is a stage of rigorous self-discipline. We do not all begin from the same starting-point. We inherit tendencies, we are the subjects of education, circumstances work upon us with various effect: and it may be that at the moment at which it first dawns upon us that we have to live in accordance with law and in the spirit of principles, one may find himself tied down by immovable cords of selfish habit, and another, naturally open to the play of every sweet and

generous impulse. But even in the latter case, so much of our life, as at present arranged and occupied, is employed in the attainment of selfish objects, and the temptation of self-gratification so waylays and assaults us at every turn, as to make it necessary that every man should look upon his own character and habits with stern eyes of self-examination. I am no preacher of self-denial for self-denial's sake: though I do not see how the garb of that stern virtue can suddenly be put on by self-indulgence, which is no virtue at all: and I know that those who willingly bury themselves in the lap of luxury must be prepared for the enervation which is its sure infection. Nor am I a sour ascetic, despising the world, frowning upon the flesh, turning the sun's light into darkness, throwing ashes upon the joy and the beauty of things: let us stretch forth our hands to take whatever good God offers us, and drink freely of the cup of innocent pleasure which He holds to our lips. I do not brand enjoyment as selfishness: *that* is solitary enjoyment, enjoyment at the expense of others, enjoyment that does not seek diffusion, but delights in concentration. When a man (or a woman either), unconsciously perhaps in accord with the wretchedly false philosophy of the day, makes his own ease, his own pleasure, his own delight in things noble or ignoble, the chief thing: when it becomes the habit of his life to look upon his own personality as the centre, and all the

universe beside only the circumference, of things: when it is the rule of his household, not that he gives way to others, but that others give way to him: when petty personal disappointments disturb his temper, and an enforced sacrifice makes him sullen and morose—then the cancer of selfishness is entering into his soul. I have used the wrong word: would that it were a cancer! For then its long aches, and sharp spasms of pain, and moments of agony unspeakable, would reveal the disease, and bid the sufferer welcome any knife, any cautery, that would rid him of it for ever. But it goes on spreading, sending down deeper roots, filling with its noxious influence the whole system, till at last it poisons love itself, and makes pity only a kind of self-regard: and the unhappy soul is dismissed into the felt presence of the Infinite Loving-kindness, having forgotten what loving-kindness is.

There is that in the relation of selfishness to character which seems to demand the active reaction of self-denial. I have said that it creeps subtly over a man, tightening its grasp upon him every day, till, without knowing that he has lost it, he finds his freedom of action gone: and one reason that this is so is, that its natural retribution is of the negative kind. The selfish man gains a certain immunity from the hardness of sacrifice, but he loses the moral glow which accompanies it: he knows not the thrill of generous pity: no heat of love raises him into a

higher sphere: no large hopes release him from the narrowness of his personal lot: no fine sympathies associate him with the moral forces that move the world and urge humanity to its final goal. He misses none of these things: his petty daily pleasure is enough for him—the supremacy of his own will within narrow bounds, the increase of his own heap of advantage. So the blind miss the form, the colour, the variety, of the world: so the deaf are shut out from the infinite suggestiveness of music, and we pity them for a deprivation which they cannot help. Is not he much more to be pitied who is wilfully blind in the midst of beauty, and will not hear, though he might, the music of the spheres? And therefore it is that we cannot afford to let our lives slide in this matter, and take the moral hue that circumstances seem to give them: that we must bring conscious self-denial to counteract an ever insidious selfishness, and be content, for the sake of life and growth, to deal hardly with ourselves. We should have a care of all enjoyments which we do not share with others. We should accustom ourselves as far as possible to the common lot. We should exercise ourselves in self-sacrifice till it not only ceases to be difficult, but becomes the unconscious law of our life. We should stand ever on the watch against the encroachment of disabling habit. Self-indulgence is the paralysis of the will, self-pleasing the numbness of the heart.

I will suppose that by the discipline of self-denial we have become unselfish: it is a matter of discipline, a goal within the reach of any resolute endeavour. But there is a counsel of perfection yet to be fulfilled: we can deny ourselves, we can control ourselves, but can we forget ourselves? That is the hardest thing of all, and yet the natural aim of a pure and strong spirit. Because above the region in which a man lives an unselfish life, curbing all unruly passions and desires, full of courteous consideration for others, moved by large hopes, consciously thrilled by wide sympathies,—above that region, selfishness takes fresh and attenuated shapes, and still subtly saps the springs of spiritual strength. It is a habit of mind now which does not issue in gross forms of action, but it bids a man think of himself more highly than he ought to think: it renders him sensitive, irritable, resentful: it makes the world revolve round him, instead of sending him to his unconsidered place in the world. And the problem of all problems is, by what charm is a man to be enabled to forget himself: those pains and languors and faintings of heart and disappointments that are so near to him: those vexations which disturb the balance of his soul: those sorrows which colour the whole world for him, and compel him to see even God through a mist of tears: those moods of unfaith in which words of prayer will not rise to his lips, and his hands drop nerveless to his side? Or can we in any

case, with any divine help, part company with our own shadow? How should self-forgetfulness be more than a paradox of faith?

I do not think that pure morality has any answer to give to these questions. On that ground some thinkers find it possible to reason their way to disinterested virtue, or to what the common conscience takes to be such, and they declare that they can kindle the enthusiasm of humanity at the same fire. But when I ask myself how I can rise from unselfishness to self-forgetting, I am obliged to have recourse to a fresh method, and to take another series of considerations into account. I must surrender my will to a Stronger than itself. I must subordinate my judgment to a more comprehensive, a more perfect Wisdom. I must suffer my existence to be merged in a larger Life. As a little child, that has not yet learned to guide its own steps, trusts implicitly to a mother's wisdom and tenderness: as a wife loyally follows her husband through the darkness, believing where she cannot see: as a husband trusts his wife's instinct of purity and goodness before his own,—so I lay my life in the hands of God. I try to do right; I labour with my whole soul to bring my will into accord with His; and the rest I leave with Him. It is the unrest of a divided purpose, the ache of an unsatisfied conscience, the uneasiness of a self-regarding spirit, that are so hard to bear; not the troubles that He sends, not the

discipline by which He trains us. Yes, we can escape from ourselves into God: otherwhere there is no refuge for us.

But mark, these things of which I have spoken may be mere words, true and good, yet words still, or the most blessed realities of life. For as words, they are, however ordered and uttered, the commonplaces of Christian faith: the question we have to ask is, whether, when the time of our trouble comes, we can put life into them? Can we, in our own throbbing, restless, troubled personality, feel the larger Life in which we too live and move and have our being? Can we take up our own sorrows, languors, disappointments, and lay them in the radiance of that Love in which they are all at once revealed as light afflictions which are but for a moment? Can we rise to the thought that what is best for the world must be best for us too, and that it would be cowardly and selfish to ask for more and better than the common lot? Can we lose ourselves in the Divine purpose, and rejoice that, come what may, the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth? Then peace, O troubled hearts and restless! the secret is found, the haven gained at last!

XVI.

Joy over one Sinner that repenteth.

LUKE xv. 10:

"Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

IF we were to hear that one of the poor creatures who are the shame and sorrow of our streets—lost to all pride of pure womanhood, and plunging deeper and deeper into sin out of very despair of rescue—had suddenly, caught up by some heavenward impulse or drawn by a sweet and strong attraction, "come to herself;" and, full of loathing of what she had been, were minded to tread the steep and narrow path of a goodness on which it was impossible that any external brightness should ever shine, resting humbly on the mercy of God, and resolute to cling to Him at whatever cost of self-mastery—what should we think and feel? Not much, I suppose: we should not be greatly stirred out of our usual equanimity:

the news would not move us enough to force us to inquire into it, and to apprehend its real character, and to make it our own. A rise in freights or cotton, fluctuations of stocks and shares, a split in a Cabinet, a brilliant new book, the success of a rival, the failure of a friend, would touch us much more deeply, and go nearer to the core of our life. I am not sure that we might not show some moral faithlessness in regard to this sudden repentance that healed a deeply diseased soul: was it really a fact? we might ask; were its motives what they were represented to be? was it likely to last? At least I think the intelligence would take its place among the innumerable items of news that catch our eyes every day in the columns of the newspapers, and pass at once out of sight and mind: true or false, we should say that it did not concern us much. And if this were so, it might teach us how far below the level of the angelic joy we live and move, for on that height pure spirits rejoice unfeignedly over every sinner that repenteth.

It is, in part, want of imagination; and, in so far, an intellectual, not a moral defect. For it is upon imagination, the power of bodying forth the distant and the unseen, the faculty of putting ourselves in others' places and seeing out of others' eyes, that what we call sympathy largely depends. And it is both astonishing and sad the way in which men and women live their own life only, or at least the life of their

family, their social clique, their religious sect, and are quite unable to project themselves into the changeful world of human passions and interests which lies all around them. And if the thrill of moral joy of which I am speaking is to touch them, it must be generated from a point within the narrow circle of their own experience. But if we had seen some one whom we loved and honoured gradually falling away from self-control and self-respect, till we had reason to fear that a fine life was destined to be choked in the mire of self-indulgence, and then all at once, when hope was well-nigh dead within us, and we were musing on the inscrutableness of God's ways with His children, we were aware of a sharp spasm of self-knowledge and repentance and recovery—should we not feel it to the very centre of our nature? Should we not be conscious of a great danger averted, a terrible blot wiped out, a gnawing sorrow turned into joy? Could we put a price upon such a blessing, or say for what meaner coin of personal advantage we would exchange it? And yet in such a case as this it might be possible that our joy should not be wholly untainted by self-regard. Some portion of a friend's shame falls upon ourselves: common interests may be injured, common purposes weakened. We may be glad that a scandal has been averted: we may be thinking more of decency than of goodness. I have already said that the root of deficient moral sympathy

may lie in the sluggishness of our imagination: but we may be sure that our joy in the repentant sinner is purely ethical, only when the sin is one that casts no shadow over our own life, only when the sinner has no nearer claim upon us than that of a common humanity. The angels, if angels there be, are on a still higher plane of moral sympathy: they share no weaknesses of human nature: they rejoice in every victory of goodness purely for itself.

If I were called upon to find a title for this fifteenth chapter of Luke, I should call it the Chapter of Repentant Sinners. It begins with the disgust of the Pharisees that the "publicans and sinners" should feel a natural attraction to Jesus, and that he on his part should "receive" and even eat with them. Then follow in succession the parables of the Straying Sheep, of the Lost Piece of Silver, the Prodigal Son—all of them apologues too well known to you to need present comment of mine. And yet as I read them the other day, a new light seemed to gleam upon the page. A new light that was yet the old; for it was no fresh intellectual illumination: I could not well understand the parables better than I had done before: their meaning, so far as it requires a mental effort to grasp it, is simple enough. But it is characteristic of spiritual truths that their spiritual apprehension waxes and wanes: and that what at one moment seems elementary, commonplace, even trite, is revealed at another

and a happier as an all-embracing, all-penetrating truth, throwing a new light upon life, and supporting duty by fresh and more awful sanctions. So it seemed to me all at once as if I too had something to do with this angelic joy: as if it were no mere distant, ideal rapture of pure spirits, upon which no shadow of human sorrow and weakness ever passes, but a cosmic moral emotion, which finding its finest and least self-regarding expression upon the heavenly heights, yet thrills through all spirits capable of fellow-feeling with goodness, and through those most who have most of a divine and celestial quality in them. Bear with me, then, a little, while I try to unfold this thought.

There are many ways of looking at life: one of the most searching and comprehensive is to regard it as the meeting-place and battle-field of hostile moral forces. Why it should be so is one of the difficulties which we shall never wholly resolve, though we see into it the farther the higher the ethical view which we take. But so it is: good and evil are in perpetual conflict around and within us, and we are so framed as to thrill with the excitement of the fight. Many will contest this view of life, more perhaps will practically ignore it: there is a disposition to believe that the movements and issues of things depend upon larger and more permanent forces than any with which we can mingle: and an abiding temptation is to seek our own ease and pleasure in the weltering chaos, and to

let the world's fate settle itself as it may. But to those who have been brought up in the old Christian way of thinking, and have been taught to look forward to the kingdom of God as their supreme ideal and final aim, it must always seem the best thing—not by any means the easiest or the least painful, but the best—to feel that an elemental, a cosmic, an eternal struggle is going on all around them, in which good is being slowly evolved out of evil, and humanity helped forward to the goal of its destiny, in what better things we know not. And in proportion as a man is able to keep this view of life steadfastly before him, and to prevent its being clouded or confused by any meaner aspect of things: still more, in proportion as he is able to throw himself unselfishly, unreservedly, into the fight, to rejoice in the victories of goodness, to grow sick at heart at its reverses, to believe all the while that it must triumph at last—we think that he rises into communion with the Eternal Divine Forces, and places himself on the side of Omnipotence. Nor is it a small matter that this one absorbing thought should take possession of a man, that he should try all things by this single touchstone. To see issues of righteousness everywhere: to believe that the best thing is also the most expedient: to be accustomed to postpone happiness to rightness, and to be persuaded that nothing can be permanently desirable on which conscience does not set its approving seal—is to be

liberated from the innumerable disturbing motions of self-will, into communion with the one steadfast Will on which all things rest, in which all things live and move.

Do you not now see whither my thoughts have been tending? The repentance of a living soul is a triumph of goodness, is a victory of God. For it is in human souls, one by one, that this great, fierce, eternal battle is being fought: no other field of conflict is possible: there, in that silence and seclusion of the heart which no other man invades, but only the coming of God, is it lost and won. It is only in appearance that God's wars are waged on the great scale: that masses of men are moved from side to side: that a single human voice thrills through many hearts, and laws are built up as an entrenchment against evil. At last the single soul must speak for itself: it resists or yields itself to guidance, it obeys or kicks against the law. And so when a will that has been enslaved by self-indulgence re-asserts its power of determination: when a drugged conscience re-awakes to the faculty of discernment and rebuke: when a heart that has been wholly given to self-pleasing, once more overflows with sweet and generous passion: when a soul that has long grovelled upon earth, finds wings again wherewith to mount into the very presence of God: in a word, when a sinner repents him and turns from the error of his ways, and a life is won for Christ and duty—no more joyful a thing can happen to the children of men. But the

joy may be like the music of the spheres, which is too high, too sweet, too majestic, for our grosser organs: in us also there must be something of a heavenly temper if we are to feel it.

And my next thought is, that Christianity has a scale of worth of its own, which is not quite that of modern thought. To it, there is nothing so precious as a human soul. I wish that I could separate these words from all associations that a theory of salvation, which is partly coarse and partly unreal, has brought about them: I am not thinking of an eternity of existence now, and the infinite capacity of pain or pleasure which that idea involves. What I mean is, that at the very basis of Christian thought lies the assumption that what thinks, feels, wills, is of indefinitely more worth than that which is incapable of these things: and next, that the highest function of even intellectual beings is their capacity of moral and spiritual communion with God. Do you think that this is quite self-evident and commonplace? Ah, there are old-fashioned notions which we unconsciously allow many of our ordinary methods of estimate to traverse. As, for instance, when we enumerate the triumphs of modern civilization: our railways, that, bridging the valley and piercing the hill, carry us with lightning speed from one end of the land to the other: our telegraphs, that emulate the poet's fairy feat and "put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes:" the

astounding plenitude and vast variety of our material resources: our swiftly recurring victories over shyly resisting nature: our conquest of an infinitely distant past, and a thousand things more that are the trite material of our modern vaunt—when we enumerate these things, and forget all the while that man carries the secret of his fate locked up in his own heart, a secret which wealth or poverty, the richest intellectual resource or the dullest want of curiosity, can do little to touch. What a man is, is the chief thing: able to bear his destiny bravely, or cowering beneath every blow of misfortune: grovelling in the mire of self-indulgence, or instinct with a divine energy of self-spending: earthy, of the earth, caught in the net of the moment's interests, or reaching forward to the eternal holiness of God.

So I could conceive a severe and awful indictment which might be laid at the bar of Heaven against a great city like this, to which it would have little or no answer. Every soul in it, the accusing Angel might say, is equally dear to God, as concealing within itself, no matter how deeply hidden, the same divine faculties: the dock-labourer, whose rough physical energies, untouched by intellectual culture, unguided by moral enthusiasm, easily overstep the barrier between brutality and crime: the professional thief, who in his life-long war against society carries his life and liberty in his hand, and cares not at what risk to others he

protects them: the street-walker, the victim—often, I know, the half-willing victim, but still the victim—slain by our civilization, and, in another rank of life, the men who partake her sin, while unhappily escaping her shame. What will it avail to plead against these things the finest docks in the world, and lines of ocean steamers each more stately and wonderful than the other, and quays heaped up with the riches of the world, and museums and libraries and art-galleries, and all the fine appliances of our civic life? I blame not these: I do not say that the poor are poor because the rich are rich, or that ignorance dogs knowledge as a shadow that it cannot shake off. But I assert, in the name of Christianity, that these two series of facts belong to different orders of being; and that if we could purchase to-morrow, by the annihilation of our wealth, the sacrifice of our luxury, that rough men in the alleys and purlieus of our town should come to love God and to feel the worth and mystery of life, and that all poor women should be pure and sweet and good, it would be a bargain at which the angels in heaven would rejoice. The things of the body and the things of the soul are beyond reach of comparison. Pure hearts, clean lives, generous sympathies, fine aspirations, the power of self-sacrifice, the enthusiasm of humanity—these are the jewels of great price; and beside these, what we chiefly pride ourselves upon, glittering and worthless gewgaws.

Then, in the last place, Christianity never despairs of a human soul. And that, I think, is hardly the mood of our prevalent philosophy, which, under the influence of physical science, is more and more passing into the pessimist mood. We are growing used to sharp contrasts between wealth and poverty, and coming to consider them inevitable. We apply to the human race, too, the idea of the struggle for existence, and believe that the victory of the few necessarily involves the defeat of the many. Nature has her spoiled work, her failures, her abortions, everywhere—why not among men too? Circumstances are powerful: heredity is an almost irresistible force: inherited passions are too strong for a weakened will: and we begin to acquiesce in the idea that this poor child is predestined to the streets, and that to be slain by drink, and yet another to vicious idleness that passes easily into crime. And it is against this mood of despair, into which we allow ourselves to slide too readily, that Christ and Christianity protest with indignant voice. Why should they not? Has there ever been a time, since the Master moulded the repentant Magdalen into a great saint, at which any miracle has been impossible to love and faith? Look down the annals of the Church, and you will find innumerable such wonders: so many, indeed, that they have disturbed the even balance of men's judgment, and brought them to believe that hideous self-accusation

was the preliminary to healing repentance, and that none but the sinner was ever developed into the saint. I know well—for in my own poor way I have tried it—how difficult the task is of waking a new life beneath the ribs of moral death: how dull natures resist pleading, and shallow ones cannot be touched by sympathy: how for some poor souls recurring temptation is all too strong, and love seems wasted on the loveless: and yet I am here to preach the gospel of eternal hope. For I have always been made to feel that, impossible as my self-imposed task might seem to be, and my ill success certain, the fault lay in myself; that with more faith, more patience, a finer hope, a deeper love, I might have triumphed; and that my Master would assuredly have succeeded where I failed ignominiously. The strayed sheep is brought back upon the shoulders of the rejoicing shepherd. The lost piece of silver rewards the searcher's toil. The Prodigal Son comes to himself again, and seeks his father's house. And there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. Shall no echo of that divine gladness drop down to earth, and for a moment thrill and purify our cold and sluggish hearts?

XVII.

Eternal Life.

JOHN xvii. 3:

"And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

THERE are more ways than one of measuring life; and perhaps the most superficial, as it is also the most obvious, is to estimate it simply by its duration. The contrast between an existence that is prolonged to eighty or ninety years, surviving all its own best interests, and hovering companionless at the brink of the grave, and one that is suddenly cut off in the first bright flush of strength and hope and love, lies upon the very surface of things, and strikes even the least thoughtful. But nothing is plainer than that a distinction may be made between lives in respect to their fulness and intensity which is just as real as the other. It is a part of our own experience that we live more in some months or years than in others:

sometimes that we drink of a deeper and sweeter cup of enjoyment, sometimes that a larger demand is made upon our powers of endurance, but still that the epoch stands out as one of a more than average vitality. So, of two lives of equal duration, who would think of putting on the same level that which was slowly passed within a confined round of habitual interests, almost without communication with the great surrounding world of speculation and passion, moved by only sluggish affections, stirred by none but petty excitements, and another which was in touch with all that is human, raised on a strong wing of aspiration, filled with the widest and the noblest hopes, thrilling with the universal joy, saddened by the universal sorrow? Then, again, of lives that are imprisoned, whether necessarily or not, within narrow bounds, one may be selfish, sluggish, set on the things of the flesh, and another, intent on self-purification, animated by the breath of the Spirit, hidden with Christ in God. To quote once more the familiar lines of our fine old poet:

> It is not growing like a tree
> In bulk, doth make Man better be;
> Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
> To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere:
> A lily of a day
> Is fairer far in May,
> Although it fall and die that night—
> It was the plant and flower of Light.
> In small proportions we just beauties see;
> And in short measures life may perfect be.

I think it is characteristic of the gospel to make a qualitative estimate of life. It has passed out of the range of the old Hebrew idea that length of days, and temporal prosperity, and abundant offspring, are signs of Divine favour, so that he who misses these obvious blessings does well to ask wherein he has offended God. Christ is himself, so to speak, the negation of this thought. No life could well be more unsatisfactory from this point of view than his, the chosen Son of God. In one of the characteristic sayings of the Fourth Gospel, he almost makes the distinction between the length and the fulness of life on which I have been insisting: "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly;" as if what he could give was at once a new principle of vitality, and would raise to a higher efficiency and intensity every function of life before possessed. And indeed the idea which runs through the whole of the New Testament, variously expressed, approached from different sides, exhibited in many lights, is that human life acquires a new quality when touched and interfused by the life of God; that in this lies its true nobleness, that here it first attains to a complete self-consciousness, and finds out of what it is capable. There is but one distinction between lives, a distinction in presence of which all others fade away: are they purely natural, or strengthened by a supernatural grace, irradiated by a supernatural glory?

And yet I suppose the minds of some people are brought back to the idea of measuring existence by its duration, by the phrase, "eternal life." It is a characteristic word of the New Testament, common to both the Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel. "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is one of the forms assumed by the Scribe's great question, which, with its answer, constitutes what I may call the brief compend or catechism of spiritual religion; and in the text we have a kind of parallel passage, only expressed in the language and accommodated to the forms of thought of the Fourth Gospel. Nor need I tell you that the Greek word here translated "eternal" has been, in connection with the question of everlasting punishment, a subject of eager controversy among interpreters and commentators. It is scarcely the classical word which denotes endless duration: it is one of the many phrases which Christianity chose out of the Greek vocabulary, one hardly knows on what principle, and converted to her own uses. This is a case of the constantly renewed difficulty which arises from the fact that Christianity did not think, though it was obliged to speak, in Greek, and that it made its own linguistic precedents, as to which a purely classical erudition can give little information. So that even if it were appropriate in this place to examine the etymology of the word which is translated eternal, with a view of ascertaining whether it ought to bear the meaning which we commonly put

upon it, I cannot promise that the process would end in any certain result. A much more hopeful thing would be to examine the actual sense in which the word is used, especially in such a passage as the text, in which Christ actually gives a definition of it: "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." The idea which these words at first suggest is surely not that of an endless duration of the natural life, but of another and higher kind of life, which under certain conditions may be added to the natural. And provisionally I should take the word eternal to mean, that while the natural life is determined by time relations—as the fact that it has a fixed beginning, course, end, is one that is essential to it—so, in some sense, the new life is independent of lapse of time and the changes which it brings with it. Ought we not to conceive of these two regions of eternity and of time as existing, not successively, but simultaneously, so that at any moment it is possible to pass from the lower to the higher, from the less to the larger? There is, you will observe, no hint given, either here or in Christ's answer to the Scribe's question, that it is necessary for a man to die to enter into eternal life, or that it is in the nature of a deferred promise: it is a fact which stands related to existence generally, and not merely to its interruption or indefinite continuance. Or, in other words, the change of which a man is conscious

when he inherits eternal life, is not in his prospects, but in himself: it is not that he shall live longer, but that he shall live differently. I do not say that there may not eventually turn out to be some connection between these two ideas; but the one is essential, the other only accessory. The main thing is, that there is an inner, secret, invisible life—the access to which is open to us—which is beyond change, exempt from decay, in the strength of which, though the outward man perish, the inward man is renewed from day to day.

To know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, what is this? Clearly the knowledge spoken of is not merely a matter of the intellect, an acceptance of the Divine existence and government, a recognition of Christ's claims as God's Son and Messenger, after any theological fashion whatever. The time, I think, is past at which Christians, at least of the thoughtful sort, can be content with the mere juxtaposition of intellectual causes with moral effects, and the assurance that these flow from those: they demand that an actual connection shall be shown, they ask to see forces at work. And there is nothing in the acceptance of merely intellectual propositions—whether that acceptance be thoughtful or thoughtless—to lead a man upwards into a higher life that shall be independent of time and change. But would it not be different if his soul were really touched with the

awe of the All-holy: if he constantly felt God not only above, but around and within him: if the thought had perpetual possession of him that all the springs of existence, material as well as spiritual, flowed from the fountain of an Infinite Will: if he recognized in his own conscience the echo of a Divine Voice, and knew that consonance with the eternal purposes elevated itself for him into a majestic and all-compelling law of duty? Would it not be different if his heart were so melted by the sweetness and the tenderness of Christ, that for love of that Friend and Master he were willing to mould himself and to be moulded into his likeness, following in his footsteps afar off, with inextinguishable admiration and affection, and ready to endure any wretchedness rather than the wretchedness of even a momentary alienation from him? Can you not see how to know God and Christ in this sense, which demands a profound and effectual sympathy with the sanctity of their holiness and the divineness of their divinity, should lift a man out of himself into a higher region of being: and that in the vital energy of such a communion he should go from strength to strength, able to do what before was impossible, able to bear what before was unbearable, and always conscious of a finer courage, a more perfect peace? And this, it seems to me, is to enter into eternal life.

Shall we change the phrase a little, and say that it

is to enter into the life of the Eternal? We have gained this advantage now, that we have dropped altogether the idea of our own petty personality and its continuance: we are swallowed up in something unspeakably greater than ourselves. We exchange our own life, so far as it is possible to shake it off, for the life that God lives: or, if you will, we are transferred into a region of being where whatever is merely earthly and temporal drops away from us, where the pilot stars are always clear overhead, and we feel the gales of heaven upon our cheek. Ah, do you reply, but these things are altogether beyond us: our feet are too firmly planted upon the solid earth for us ever to begin to soar into the empyrean: the life of God is little more than an empty phrase to us: all we can conceive of is life within the limitations, cumbered by the weaknesses, harassed by the temptations, of the flesh. This is precisely the problem, I reply, which Jesus Christ has solved for us. I do not say that the Christian's moral and spiritual horizon is bounded by the life of the Galilean Prophet; or that it is not possible to see beyond, above, around the pure beauty of a consummate human existence, the awful and infinite splendours of the glory of God. But I do say that Christ has, so to speak, translated the life of God for us into the language of our own strivings and aspirations, and shown us, once for all, the method by which the Divine interpenetrates and informs the human

spirit. I suppose that if it were possible for any man to know God through and through, he would in the same act know Christ: and so in a very real, though a less complete sense, to know Christ is to know God. And this is the knowledge which all through the Gospels, and especially in the Fourth, is described as Life. It is insight to the conscience, vigour to the will, purity to the affections, and, above and beyond this, a fiery enthusiasm for righteousness, a constant sense of an unseen Presence, an unwearied trust in God.

The opposite of life is death. To what death then is eternal life opposed? To me, I confess, it stands in no antithesis to physical death, the interruption of the life of the body. What that is, in its moral aspects, I do not know, nor will any of us know till in our turn we pass through the gate which opens for no returning steps: physically, it is an universal fact, which comes equally to those who have inherited the full privileges of eternal life, and those who live most resolutely and with least compunction the life of the flesh. Nor do I know whether eternal death — a phrase, by the way, which is not scriptural—is either possible or conceivable; for it means an alienation from God so absolute as to leave no hope that it can ever be either lightened or removed. But it is clear that the death which in our thought stands over against eternal life is the chill and lethargy of the

spirit, which is quite untouched by any longing for the higher, finer, wider life that is yet possible to it: an existence that wallows with the swine and is content: a heart that can listen to the plaint of distressed humanity, yet throb no quicker for it: a soul that has so lost all faculty of vision as to rest in the shows and shadows of the material world, without even a passing craving for a reality behind. Do you find that this infinite and irreconcilable distinction between life and death has any time reference at all, or would not subsist in its infinity, in its irreconcilability, were all lives limited to the same brief span, or all assured of endless duration? To know God is life; to live apart from God is death: in the light and darkness of that contrast, no other difference of human fate is visible.

At the same time, let us not forget that all the attributes of Divine existence have a certain infinite and eternal quality. It is of the essence of God's being that He should be without beginning or end, standing apart from time, not to be touched by change. We say, in our stammering way, that past and future are with Him one perpetual present, and all successions and relations of time summed up in an inconceivable now. And I think that it is the experience of those who least unsuccessfully strive to live the divine life, that it ministers an entrance to them into a realm of being which is above disturbance, beyond change; where they feel the settledness of law, and

the trustworthiness of love, and the invincibility of righteousness. An imperfect glimpse of the character and purposes of God is all that is vouchsafed even to the best of us; but what little we see infuses into us a feeling of serenity, we know that our feet are fixed on the Everlasting Rock, and we discern far below the weltering sea of things that change and pass. Do we then expect God's wisdom to fail? or His righteousness to go astray? or His love to lose its tenderness? or His patience to grow weary? Such as they have been from the beginning must they continue to be evermore; and when the obstacles which human sin and folly have raised up against them are beaten down, we know that they will manifest themselves in their full beauty and brightness. This is the one stable thing in a world of change: this, the Eternal, which lies behind and sustains the temporal.

And so I cannot help thinking that to become incorporate in any degree with the life of God must be to partake in some sort of His unchangeableness. Ask me not how it should be so: we are meddling here with things too great for us: our words do not reach the height and compass of our thoughts: we are dealing with mysteries, we speak as in a figure. But mark: it is on the side of that which is in God most truly infinite and unchangeable that we draw nigh to Him: wisdom and love and righteousness and patience in us, are the same qualities as in Him, only

their poor shadow and pale presentment; and we touch Him, if I may say so in all reverence, at the very heart of His being. And as, on the one hand, it seems to me that to have once truly lived with God is to live with Him always, to be independent of time, to rise superior to change,—so, on the other, I cannot think of Him as suffering those who have once known Him to pass away into the abyss of non-existence: that they should live only in His infinite recollection, incapable of even an answering emotion of gratitude: and that generation after generation of men, loving, aspiring, praying, hoping, obeying, should pass away, leaving Him absolutely alone in a silent and solitary glory. Is heaven, then, a place peopled only by the memories of God? Nay, wherever He is, I seem to see the choir of attendant saints, and to catch the far-off echo of their perpetual hymn.

XVIII.

The Elder Son.

LUKE xv. 31:

"And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

I DO not know any interpretation of Scripture that is more inadequate, and therefore more misleading, than that which finds in the parable of the Prodigal Son only an apologue of the relations of Jews and Gentiles to the Christian dispensation. Were it no more than that, I hardly see why Christ should have ever uttered it. I am not in the least disposed to assent to the theory, much in vogue with a certain school of critics, which makes Luke's Gospel a conscious modification of the Christian tradition in favour of Pauline teaching and practice; and bids us see in it, not what Jesus actually said, but what a friend and disciple of Paul's would have liked him to say. No doubt, from the point of view of this theory, the interpretation of the parable to which I have

alluded is far from unlikely. It, as it were, stamps with the approval of the Master beforehand, the efforts of the Apostle to the Gentiles to bring back the lost children of God. And I can understand how, from another point of view, men should prefer to put this meaning upon the story. Looked at as an apologue of the relation of sinful souls to God, it leaves no room for a doctrine of atonement—to which, indeed, its whole spirit is opposed. There is no anger of the father which needs to be appeased. No sooner is he assured of his son's repentance, than he goes half-way to meet him. The prodigal slays no sacrifice, invokes no mediation: that he is sorry and ashamed, is enough. If the parable really is, as I believe it to be, the plainest, the most vivid, the most accurate presentation possible of what every erring spirit ought to be to God, of what God will be to every erring spirit—it is the completest and most effectual refutation of ordinary Evangelical theology: and I do not wonder that men who believe in that theology desire to pass it by, or to show that it means something else. But in so doing they miss the very centre-point of Christ's thought of men and God, and are content to decline upon Paul's.

One word more as to the structure of this parable. In Christ's apologues, the outward form and the spiritual meaning are very variously related. Sometimes a parable is a mere figure of speech; as when the

kingdom of heaven is compared to the grain of mustard-seed, or Christ says of himself, I am the true vine. Sometimes it is an analogy, in which the story, so far as it is one, corresponds point by point with the spiritual facts which it is intended to illustrate. But the peculiarity of the parable of the Prodigal Son is, that the spiritual significance is so interwoven with the stuff and course of the narrative, that it cannot be disentangled from them; that the meaning can be expressed in the words of the story without any process of interpretation; and that were we ourselves placed in similar circumstances, its phrases would naturally rise to our lips and say for us all that can and need be said. The cry of the prodigal, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thine hired servants," breaks from every penitent spirit as its natural voice: there is no figurative element in it: it is impossible to conceive of a contrite heart that should not be ready to adopt it. It is a peculiarity of Christ's spiritual method that, while apparently confining himself to the local, the temporary, the individual, he attains the general and the eternal; and so here, in the sorrows, the repentance, the reconciliation of a single soul, he tells the story of the universal fate.

It is in this spirit that I take the words of my text to-day: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I

have is thine." If they allude only to the religious privileges of the Jewish people, they do not instruct me much, and touch me not at all. But it is quite otherwise when I look at them in their simple spiritual significance. What words are these, "ever with me," "all that I have is thine"? To live always with God, to be a partaker of the infinite riches of God—what words can express more completely than these the consummation of human growth, the height and fulness of perfection to which the soul can aspire? We feel that they go beyond the strength and rapture of the most accomplished saint, and are large enough, if we fill up the full measure of their meaning, to express the religious privileges of Christ himself. What more is possible to the very angels of God than to live always in the light of His presence, and to drink with full draughts from the perennial fountain of His holiness? And after we have let our imagination settle upon this great thought, and have realized, as far as is possible to us, all that is in it: when we have strayed away in fancy into regions of religious aspiration and achievement, where there is a clearer and more invigorating air than ever we can hope to breathe—it is almost startling to reflect that the very words which have at once uplifted us and filled us with despair, accurately describe our own relation to God. Nor do I mean what our relation might be, but what it is. We are always with God. At every

moment of our existence, He besets us behind and before. Not only are we sheep of His pasture, people of His hand; but His Spirit is "nearer to us than breathing, closer than hands and feet," soliciting us in a thousand varying voices, leading us in innumerable unfelt acts of guidance, pressing upon us in countless subtle influences of love. And all that He has is ours already: the beauty of the world, the common bounties of every day, the wisdom of the past, a grace that is always waiting, a patience that cannot be wearied, a strength that will bear us up to the very empyrean, a spiritual communion which is perfect peace, a hope that cannot be shamed. These are the ordinary conditions of our existence. On God's side of the relation, nothing is ever wanting. He says always to every one of us, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

And these are the privileges which we forfeit by wilful, impenitent sin. I use the word forfeit: neglect of privilege is one thing, forfeiture quite another. Again, let us dismiss from our minds all thought of punishment: retribution always pursues its slow and sure way, whatever our spiritual state: alienation from God does not hasten it, reconciliation with God does not abrogate it: as we sow, we must reap. But as the distinguishing quality of our privilege as sons is that we live with God, and have an unlimited access to the riches of His spiritual bounty, so any rebellion against

Him, any turning away from Him, any conscious preference of our own will to His, carries with it, so long as we persevere in it, the forfeiture of these things. I am not now so much expounding the parable as declaring a law of the religious life: our sin hangs a veil between us and God: He vanishes, as it were, from the sphere of our vision: and if we try to pray to Him, our words are either frozen upon our tongue, or recognized, even while we utter them, as quite perfunctory and formal. Or, to put it in another way, the very characteristic of this mood of mind is, that we do not want God; we have lost our perception of the blessedness of His presence, and the riches of His grace are no longer desirable to us. We are like the people of Israel of whom Jeremiah complained: we have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewn us out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. No effort that we can make will avail to keep us living and active on both sides of our nature at once: the service of the flesh renders the service of God impossible: He leaves us to ourselves, to make the best of the delights which we have chosen. If we try to keep up a double life, what should be the better half of it is a lie and a pretence, which may deceive others, but cannot long delude ourselves, and from the very beginning stands confessed in its true character before God. And it is only when, in some convincing way, the hollowness and worthlessness of our self-pleasing is revealed to

us, and we turn back with anxious and humble longing to the blessings which we have lost, that the possibility of their restoration begins to be felt by us. The prodigal is always in a far country. He dwells of necessity where he cannot see his Father.

But the elder son—are we not all elder sons? We remain quietly at home: we run no wild race of profligacy: we are not driven to herd with the swine and to share their husks: no passion of penitence tears us, we are thrilled through and through by no joy of reconciliation. Possibly we are punctual in a self-imposed round of duty, and do not fail in the decencies of life: if we rise to no heights of rapturous self-devotion, we sink into no abyss of self-indulgence and degradation. The elder son of the parable was all this and perhaps more: the gentleness of his father's rebuke seems to imply that he had no serious fault to find with him: and yet he was capable of so mean a jealousy as to complain that what was done to welcome the returning prodigal had never been done for him; and he had in him enough neither of natural affection nor of sympathy with victorious goodness to rejoice in his brother's repentance. Think, I pray you, what it all means, and what a strange callousness of heart, what a terrible dulness of conscience, this conduct implies. For what more can a man desire or have than to dwell always with God, and to possess all that God has to give? Is it not characteristic of all true

human love, and much more of that divine affection which is its archetype, that the more it gives, the more it has to give; that to drink freely at that fountain does not exhaust but augments its flow; and that it is impossible to conceive of God's bounty to any single soul being diminished by the fact that it is called upon to share it with universal humanity? If my brother stands by my side repentant, purified, accepted, does it push me further from God? If God pours Himself into my shallow spirit till the earthen vessel overflows with its divine burthen, can He not still fill all hearts, can He not still quicken all consciences? When I have all that I can hold and bear, have I done anything to exhaust the infinite ocean of God's grace? Surely to complain of another's privilege, is to prove that I have not even begun to enter into my own!

And now we begin to see how neglect of privilege may in the long-run be worse than its forfeiture. If we were asked to choose which we would rather be—the younger son, with the memory of his sin, it is true, behind him, full of a trembling consciousness of his own instability, knowing that he has still to face inevitable retribution, but yet joyful in the restoration of his father's love, and feeling how good a thing it is to be at peace beneath the familiar roof, even though as a hireling he should stoop to its meanest work; or the elder, with a record outwardly blameless, yet within, cold-hearted, complaining, self-righteous, un-

worthy of the blessings which he had so long enjoyed, and so sated with love as to have grown loveless—could we for a moment hesitate? Our pity goes forth to the boy whom, as he sinks lower and lower, privation and disgrace at last bring to himself; and who, when he has extricated himself by a mighty effort from his slough of despond, turns sorrowfully and doubtfully homewards, fearing to meet his father's rebuke, yet knowing that even his righteous anger was better than the delusive delights of self-indulgence. But a more tragic lot than his is that of the elder brother, to whom could be spoken words of infinite promise and compass, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine"—yet past whose careless feet the waters of life have flowed untasted, before whose heedless eyes the banquet of Divine privilege had been spread in vain; and who, while able to explore the heights and depths of perfectness, had still to learn the first lisping lessons of humility and love.

Do not mistake me, as if I thought that we were likely to fall into the precise fault of the elder brother. I fear we are far from the joy which the angels feel in every sinner that repenteth, and that our enthusiasm for the triumph of goodness is but a faint and pallid emotion. But we have no temptation to feel any jealous grudge at the restoration to God's love of the fallen and the degraded, or to imagine that His out-

stretched arms are not wide enough to embrace all His children. It is the dull neglect of privileges which are always waiting for us, of a love which continually closes us round, of opportunities of growth which perpetually beset us, that constitutes our danger. There is a Catholic saying that the acolyte is too near the altar to be filled with the awe of its mysteries; so, too, the very richness, continuity, impartiality of Divine bounty, may prevent its natural effect upon our spirits. And it is in a sense the sole and constant work of religious teaching to awaken men's souls from the insensibility thus engendered, and to quicken them to a sense of that awful Reality in which they live and move and have their being. We could not be what we are, if we had faith even as a grain of mustard-seed. God always round about us and within us: the Quickener of our life, the Sustainer of our energies, the Giver of every good and perfect gift: pleading with us for our own souls, offering us, as the joy and reward of communion with Himself, the possibility of rounded growth, the harmonious development of faculty: leading us into the way of peace, and promising us a sure safeguard against all sorrow and disappointment: every circumstance of our lives His guiding hand, every whisper of our conscience His warning voice, every upward motion of our souls His divine attraction—who could believe that these things were real, and yet live the dull and sluggish life of sense?

"Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." Is there not something awful in this imperturbability of the Divine bounty? It recalls to my mind that other phrase of the Psalmist, "But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared;" as if a love that could not be wearied, a placability that no offence could move to unrelenting anger, a long-suffering that no obstinacy of rebellion could exhaust, rose so high above the shallow affections, the impotent generosities of men, as in its grandeur to be an object of dread. For eighteen hundred years we have been saying that God's sun shines, and His rain falls, upon just and unjust alike, and that He is kind even to the evil and the unthankful, till the phrase has little meaning in our ears and never reaches our hearts. Who knows that science may not be about to teach us the lesson which religion has been unable to enforce? For slowly, but surely, the idea of the invariability of law is being inculcated upon us; that we live within conditions which we are unable to change or modify, and that these conditions are the same for all. God does not go out of his way to punish a sinner or to save a saint: both are citizens of one moral commonwealth, both are subjects of the same equal providence. To this conviction we are coming; and there only needs another, namely, that the actual order of things, however we foolishly and wickedly dash ourselves against it, is wisest, kindest,

best, to complete our instruction. And so science, too, when once we have fully interpreted her teachings, will lead us back to the God whose word to every one of us is, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." The promise stands fast, however men may neglect it: no ingratitude of ours can stay that ever-flowing bounty: and all the answer the Father makes to the sluggishness and carelessness of His children, is to maintain His unvaried attitude of beneficence. Have we ever found Him wanting? Have we ever drawn nigh to Him without His drawing nigh to us? Have we ever accepted any promise of His, and had to complain of shortcoming? Whenever we have stooped down to drink at the fountain of life, has it failed to quench our thirst? Has not a little insight been rewarded with larger light, and strength always been developed into strength? Would that we could indeed discern the grandeur of our inheritance, and lay hold with full arms of the unfailing promises of God!

XIX.

A Parable of Florence.

EZEKIEL viii. 12:

"Chambers of . . . imagery."

I ONCE read a pathetic story, which, if I am to tell it at all, I must tell in my own words. Sir David Wilkie, visiting a convent in Spain, was shown a noble fresco, representing what Scripture scene I do not know, on the wall of the refectory. And as he talked with the aged monk who was his guide, of the still life-like forms, the still glowing colours, "Ah!" said the latter, "it seems to me, who have seen this picture day by day since I was a boy, changeless always, and have watched one brother after another drop out of our ranks and disappear, as if its figures were the real and living men, and we but the painted shadows of humanity."

I am newly come from a city of fading frescos, which I visited for the first time almost twenty years ago, and which, therefore, I could not look upon with

quite fresh eyes. And the impression, a prevailingly sad one, which it left upon my mind was, not that the old pictured life mocked in its changelessness the instability of the new, but that the new, coarser and commoner by far, had left the old stranded in pathetic helplessness. There was a time when Florence almost vied with the Athens of Pericles in being the centre of the most brilliant intellectual activity which the world has ever seen. A pious, a decorous, a well-governed city it never was: its passions ran high, its feuds were fierce; it was by turns capricious, fickle, ungrateful. But all this means that it was capable, too, of fine enthusiasms, and eager devotions, and large self-sacrifice, which left indelible marks upon its civic life. And it was characteristic of the Florence of which I am speaking, that whatever it felt deeply should find expression in beautiful art, and most of all the art that appeals to the eye: it had its poets—one of them among the greatest of all time—its scholars, its historians; but its truest children were its painters, its sculptors, its architects, its goldsmiths, its potters—sometimes men who plied every one of these tasks at once, and, with whatever instruments they worked, achieved marvels. So that it is not enough to say that they made their own beloved city, and all the cities on the Tuscan hills round about her, beautiful exceedingly, but that they impressed upon them the life of an intensely living age. It is as if the aspira-

tions and beliefs and passions and affections of two or three brilliant generations had become monumental in stone and in marble, on storied wall and glowing canvas. Two mediæval centuries live on into the cold, scientific daylight of the nineteenth.

And still it is with a fading, a never more than half-comprehended life. I do not so much speak of the effects of physical decay, though they are visible enough: the frescos are shrinking, as it were, into the walls on which they are painted, and look out no more than pale ghosts of their former brilliancy and beauty: if some pictures still glow in undiminished splendour, one is apt to suspect the restorer's touch: about many of the buildings gathers a quite modern squalor, which tells the tale of long neglect; while the new and the commonplace impudently elbow the old and the stately. But what is sadder than this, and strikes more home to the imagination, is the gulf—not of time merely, but of feeling and purpose—that yawns between the new Florence and the old. They do not love the same things, they do not hate the same things, they do not believe the same things, they do not strive after the same things; and to the eye of insight, the real divergence between them is all the more marked when antiquarian curiosity or æsthetic dilettanteism apes the form and takes the place of living sympathy. To sum up all that I mean in a single illustration, how much is shut up in the fact that St. Mark's is now

only a museum, where you pay your franc to a government official at the door, and then wander at your will through silent cell, and deserted refectory, and shady cloister, gazing at the flowers of sacred art which a more believing generation cast upon every wall! Yet it was once for a while almost the centre of literary and religious and artistic life for Florence. It pawned its income that the great collection of classical manuscripts which the re-birth of learning had brought to its city should not be dispersed. You may see there the cell from which the good Saint Antonino was brought to be the poor man's Archbishop of Florence. It was among the damask roses of its cloister garden that Savonarola meditated the sermons which set Italy ablaze. There Fra Angelico painted happy angels upon his knees, and showed, with Fra Bartolommeo, how it was possible to be consummate artist and consummate monk at once. Art is a great thing, and beauty a supreme object of human striving; but art is noblest, and beauty most desirable, when an inner life animates them: but when the life has died out of the form, the form, perfect though it may be, has lost its most signal worth. I do not know anything that affected me more than the sight at St. Mark's of a splendid collection of missals and other service-books, brought from suppressed convents all round about, and now carefully laid out in glass cases for the inspection of the curious. Nothing could be

more gorgeous, more elaborate, more beautiful, than their execution: there were single pages which, in the delicate loveliness of the arabesques and miniatures with which they were adorned, must have employed the patient labour of months: they told of an age when no expenditure of toil and time and skill was thought excessive, so it were in God's service. But they had been vocal once, and they are silent now. To what heavenward aspirations may not their music have given wings! What tears of penitence may not have dropped upon their rigid parchment! What rapt thanksgivings, once thrilling the air in joyful freedom, and now imprisoned for ever within their quaint notation! But they have ceased to be intermediaries between earth and heaven: they are objects of cold æsthetic criticism, no better than a gazing-stock for the ungodly.

But you are already wondering why, to-day, after so long an interval of silence, I should be dwelling on recollections of travel which appear to have little connection with the thoughts and aspirations which usually occupy us in this place. It is because it all seemed to me to be a parable of what John Bunyan called the City of Mansoul. Not, indeed, of your souls, my younger hearers: yours is the city of aspirations yet unfulfilled, of achievements still incomplete, where pictures are being painted, and shapeless blocks of marble are being hewn into breathing forms, and

airy towers are still rising skywards. But I saw in the Florence of to-day, in which the present and the past are so subtly mingled, a figure of what such an one as I must be, the formative part of whose life lies behind him, and who at best can look forward to only a few years more of thought and work. I will not press the comparison too closely, or try to make out that the analogy is perfect in all its parts: no man's relation to his past is quite the same as another's: here, there are violent breaks, sudden transitions, an end which the beginning hardly seemed to involve: there, the process is one of quiet, gradual development, and the philosophic poet's desire is fulfilled—

> For I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.

But I should think that no one, not even the most successful in carrying youth into old age, and making old age the continuance and completion of youth, could reach the downward slope of life's decline, without feeling how much there was which he had left irrecoverably behind, and that he was to a certain extent out of touch with the new life around him. Girt about as we may be by troops of loving friends, there is a larger troop still of those who have gone over to the majority. Those who would, in what we call the course of nature, precede us behind the veil, disappear one by one, till at last, with a kind of sad

surprise, we find ourselves the oldest of our race, the seniors of our class, with few with whom we can exchange contemporaneous memories, and fewer still to whom we can look up. One by one, friends of our own age drop out of the ranks, till we come to wonder at the mystery of Providence, which seems to strike at every sweet and saintly head, and leaves us in all our unprofitableness. So, too, we have to look to the past, at least in part, for our ideals: perhaps we seem now cold and unimpassioned, unwilling to move from the ancient ways, imbued with a cautious, conservative wisdom. But we were full of divine folly once: we thought no enterprize for the kingdom of God impossible: we looked out on the world as if our sword could speedily conquer it for Christ: we dreamed that we could speak the piercing and reconciling word which should heal the discords and stanch the wounds of the Church. The predetermined course of humanity was too strong for us, and carried us away on its irresistible flood: our plans succeeded only as far as they deserved to do, our faithfulness reaped no more than a strictly measured harvest: and it is our temptation to feel that the schemes of younger men are no wiser and better than ours were, and that at all events we cannot throw ourselves into them with a full heart. And this leads me, at last, to the real dislocation of feeling which manifests itself between separated generations. Young and old do not always understand

one another, and find it hard to live together on terms of affectionate confidence. The fault, I admit, may be on either side: all I am concerned to assert to-day is, that it does not always attach to the elders. Our grey hairs are a barrier between us and the young hearts that we would so willingly touch, the young lives that we would so gladly influence: where we would conciliate confidence, we find ourselves unconsciously inspiring fear: and those for whom no sacrifice on our part would be too great, pass us by as if we had no concerns in common. So now, unless my speech has been clumsy indeed, you begin to see how I saw in the contrast between the old Florence and the new, a parable of my own life.

But this is not all, though perhaps the saddest part, of what I have to say. Florence is, almost more than any other city, full of memories which perpetually rush unbidden upon the instructed mind and fill it with ghosts, in a sense more real than the poor human phantasms which crowd its pavements to-day. It was in that narrow street that Dante first met the little Beatrice, "humbly and honestly clad in her crimson frock," and loved her with the immortal love that echoes down the ages. In that garden, Lorenzo de Medici assembled his Platonic academy; and one day came to him the boy Michael Angelo, with the satyr's mask, apparently antique, but really wrought with his own hands. Into that clear and lucid air Galileo first

raised his magic tube, and discovered—with infinite loss of comfort to himself, with infinite gain of truth to mankind—the fixedness of the sun, the swift whirling of the earth. It is easy to fancy that the last echoes of Savonarola's prophetic eloquence have hardly yet died away within the vast dome of the cathedral; and it was from the square that you cross every day that his fiery soul fled on wings of fire to heaven. Two beautiful forms, each in the sweet stateliness of early manhood, I seem in fancy to meet, not Florentine, yet drawn to Florence by an irresistible attraction: one is the young Raffaelle, come down from his Umbrian hills to be the most perfect exponent in form and colour of the divine beauty; the other, not less beautiful, John Milton, one day to be the peerless singer of a lost Paradise. And so I might go on, almost indefinitely, illustrating, still in the line of my parable, how the peculiar and inalienable wealth of a kindly old age lies in its memories. For myself, I never regret advancing years so little as when I find, in conversation with younger men, who hold, I own, the promise of the future, that names which to them are no more than shadowy traditions, bring up before my memory venerable and beautiful forms which it were an irreparable loss indeed not to have known. Their time of reminiscence will come: meanwhile, I have had mine. There is no love like that which has shielded our own heads; no goodness so in-

spiring as that from which we ourselves have drawn the breath of life; no heroism so heroic as that whose contagious thrill we, in some poor measure, have caught; no saintliness so sweet as that which has rebuked and raised our own imperfectness. And as posterity is never hard upon those who have achieved much for humanity—as it forgives quarrels of painters, and arrogance of poets, and weaknesses of statesmen—so, as life wears on, the sordid stains drop away from the figures that fill our chambers of memory, and we recollect only the strength of manly resolution, the sweetness of womanly sympathy, the ardour of public spirit, the unwearied enthusiasm of humanity, the eager upward rush to God, of those whom we have known and loved; while the issue is a larger, rounder, more harmonious conception of life. We dwell with serene pleasure upon the reflection that men were better and wiser than once we thought them to be. We see that, after all, more has been accomplished than we feared, and that the future of society is safe. If the yesterday in which we bore our own part was noble, why not to-day, even though we do not wholly understand it, and to-morrow, which lies unseen in the hands of God?

Once more, and lastly, the various elements in the visible presentment of such a city as Florence share the attribute of permanence in very different degrees. It seemed to me as if the frescos grew fainter year

after year, and that the time was within reach at which, despite all loving care, they would fade wholly out of sight. And the general aspect of the place must be very different from what it was four hundred years ago: one can imagine a contemporary of Dante, or of Savonarola, wandering to-day through its streets, and recognizing only now and then, with half-dazed eyes, some familiar arch, some well-known tower. But, again, there are works of sculptor and architect which have in them as much of immortality as human handicraft can have. There is the Baptistry, Dante's "il mio bel San Giovanni," with its gates of Paradise; and Giotto's tower, leaping upwards into the blue, graceful and stately as a Virgin's lily; and Arnolfo's cathedral, flecked with every hue that marble can take, and the vast dome with which Brunelleschi crowned it. Will the time ever come at which Michael Angelo's David will not flourish in perpetual youth and strength? While, if even these pass away, there will still be the lucent air, and the grey Tuscan hills, shadowy with cypress and olive, and the rushing Arno, to recall to mind the great and beautiful things that men have thought and said and done on this enchanted spot. So, too, as we consciously near the close of life, and count up, as by a kind of sad compulsion, the futile schemes, the disappointed hopes, the mistaken ideals of bygone years, it is well still to feel that there remain ideals about which no mistake is possible, and

labours which must bear fruit, and hopes that are rooted in the very constitution of things, and the unchangeable will of God. For if, as Milton has it, "old experience doth attain to something of prophetic strain," it shows its power in the separation of the false from the true, of the unstable from the permanent, of the imperfect from the perfect. Perhaps as one looks back over life, it is often with the consciousness of having spent strength for that which was not worthy of the sacrifice, of having insisted upon distinctions which we see now not to have been vital, of having grasped the temporal while we missed the eternal. And so it is unhappily possible to grow cold and passionless and disenchanted, to let the world take its course, to think nothing greatly worth while, and to find happiness in watching the battle from some safe and serene eminence, rather than in keeping one's place in the ranks to the last. But it is the privilege of those who are so fortunate as to carry on the moral enthusiasm of youth into their declining years, to unite with it a faculty of clear discernment, a capacity of assured hope, which youth can never know. To such, Love and Duty are watchwords which thrill them through and through to the last pulsation of their hearts. To such, the kingdom of God still stands for all of good that is possible to humanity. The method and the spirit of Christ suffice them, and they are content to abide in the hands of God. At any failure which is

not the result of their own unfaithfulness they can afford to smile; and what men call delay they deem a patient waiting for the occasion of Infinite Wisdom. Happy those who, animated by such hopes, filled by such purposes, are permitted to die sword in hand, and with their faces to the foe! Nor less happy, it may be, the larger number who, compelled to retire from the field, can watch with cheerful augury the struggle in which they no longer bear a part, and are content at last "to rest in the Lord, and to wait patiently for Him."

XX.

The Irony of Christ.

MARK x. 28—31:

"Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundred-fold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come, eternal life. But many that are first shall be last, and the last first."

THIS is at first sight a perplexing passage. For nothing can be plainer than that the promise which it conveys was not fulfilled. In what sense could it be said that the Apostles received "an hundred-fold now in this time" of the temporal blessings which they had abandoned? Paul, indeed, was not of the Twelve; but we may take his picture of what the apostolic life was as truer than any imaginative description of mine could be: "Even unto this

present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place: and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless: being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things, until this day." Nay, how could such a promise as Christ seems to make in this passage be seriously made and literally fulfilled? These temporal blessings—houses and lands, and all the innocent delights of home—are, to use a mathematical phrase, incommensurable with the spiritual joys and rewards of the gospel: they belong to another plane of thought, another region of being: and no chain of cause and effect unites the two. It is an old difficulty for those who do not clearly grasp this fact, that the wicked often flourish like a green bay-tree; and that whom God loveth, He chasteneth. It is a general moral principle that it needs the greatest watchfulness lest prosperity should harden the soul, and that the sweetest lives are often those on which some cloud perpetually rests. One whose mind habitually dwells with houses and lands, and all that makes up a flourishing and happy civic life, may indeed be proficient in the exercise of many household virtues, but can hardly rise to the height of joyful self-sacrifice, from which it may be truly said, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee."

A large part of this tenth chapter of Mark is occu-

pied with the collision of the two worlds, the temporal and the spiritual. I think I see it even in the story of the little children who were brought to Jesus that he should touch them: surely the moral of it is, that the kingdom of God is only for the single-minded, the single-hearted. Then comes that most pregnant and affecting episode of the young man who had great possessions, and who, having come to Christ and having made the great refusal, went away sorrowful. A certain difficult saying of Christ's follows, with its commentary, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" and then the claim of Peter, and the answer to it which we are considering just now. Last of all, the same contrast reappears in a somewhat different form when James and John, the sons of Zebedee, ask that when the kingdom comes they may sit, the one on his right hand, the other on his left, in his glory. It was inevitable that this collision of thought and feeling should occur. The temporal only gradually gave place to the spiritual Messiah in the minds of the disciples. They were slow to comprehend that the kingdom, the most blessed of all realities on one side, was on the other no more than a figure of speech. The Apostles could not realize the fact that, when they had left their nets and followed Christ, they had broken for ever with the comfortableness of the world; and some of the more ambitious among them may well have dreamed of

"thrones, dominations, princedoms, powers." Only when Christ was lifted up on his cross did they begin to discern that the servants were no better than the Master, and that as was his fate, so must theirs be. They struggled slowly towards a new ideal of life; learning only at last, and under the irresistible teaching of circumstance, that their Master's secret of living was to die daily to himself, to the flesh, to the world.

What, then, of Christ's promise in the text?

Many years ago, the late Bishop Thirlwall wrote an essay on the Irony of Sophocles, which excited a good deal of attention at the time, and has ever since been regarded as a model of acute and weighty criticism. He defined "verbal irony" as "a figure which enables the speaker to convey his meaning with greater force, by means of a contrast between his thought and his expression, or, to speak more accurately, between the thought which he evidently designs to express and that which his words properly signify." It is thus a case of saying one thing and meaning another; and yet of so saying it as to make it clear that your real meaning does not lie in the obvious signification of your words. I may, for instance, agree to a proposition, political, moral, religious, that is laid before me, yet in such a way as to indicate below the surface of my words a disagreement more profound than any mere words of dissent could express. Or, again, when I utter an opinion exactly contrary to what might

justly expected of me, out of accord with what I said yesterday, out of accord with all the previous tenor of my thought and speech, it is quite plain either that I have turned suddenly round upon myself, or that I really mean the opposite of what I am saying. Do not for a moment imagine that irony is intended to deceive. On the contrary, it is an oblique form of speech, which is stronger, more vivid, more pointed, than the direct. It has its own forms of phrase, its own turns of expression, by which it makes its true character manifest. It may be, and is, one of those more refined devices of human speech which the slow mind, the dull imagination, find it hard to follow and to interpret; but we should lose much if we brought down all our subtler intercourses of mind to the level of the fool. And a grave and measured irony is often a distinguishing mark of a high and judicial intellect.

We are apt to think of irony as chiefly a polemical weapon, and as a vehicle of expression for scorn and contempt. But we shall see that it is not so, when we reflect upon what we are wont to call the irony of circumstance. There is the feeling traceable in all literature, belonging to every civilized age, to which no man who broods over his own fate can be a stranger, that we are, as it were, the sport of life, Providence, some higher Power—call it what you will—in the unexpectedness of misfortune, in the contrast between the apparent and the real in our existence.

"Look to the end," is a proverb which expresses this feeling; and a phrase of similar meaning is Solon's celebrated word to Crœsus, "that he counted no man happy till he was dead." Half our sharpest woes are what we call bolts out of the blue: if prepared for, yet prepared for in a region out of our ken, and flashing upon us unawares. And then when the trouble is come, and our misery is greater than we can bear, we begin to think of the security in which we sat, of the carelessness with which we assumed that our prosperity was unassailable, of the serenity with which we ignored, so far as we ourselves were concerned, the sure vicissitudes of life. Nor is it merely that our existence resembles at once "the torrent's smoothness ere it dash below," and the rage of broken waters which are long ere they find a quiet channel—but that our affairs, private and public alike, are apt to take the strangest turns, and to lead us into the most unexpected situations. If sometimes we pause for a moment to estimate our position, it is at the same time to wonder what forces have brought us thither, and to acknowledge how little our own deliberate will has had to do with it. I do not say that to talk of the irony of fate is to take a religious view of life: that would rather express itself in a confession of personal ignorance and weakness, and a desire to clasp the guiding hand of God, following whithersoever He would have us go. But it is only natural that life's

sharp and sudden contrasts should be deeply felt; that men should be acutely conscious of how easily they may deceive themselves as to the real meaning of their existence. Rich, strong, prosperous, we wake one morning with an unusual pain, an undefinable languor; and the physician, whom we half-carelessly consult, warns us that this May will be our last. The treasure of our heart is embarked in a whole argosy of love, when suddenly our dear ship goes down, and we are beggars indeed. And it is the contrast between the sunshine and the storm, between the confidence and the despair, which we call the irony of circumstance.

And from this it is only a natural transition to the thought, that when a very lofty nature, morally and intellectually, is brought into contact with others on a much lower level, the element of irony must, consciously or unconsciously, enter into their intercourse. It is, so to speak, a principle of accommodation, a means by which the higher descends for a little while to the level of the lower. But I need hardly say, it is the irony, not of scorn and sarcasm, but of love and pity, that would as far as possible open blind eyes, and warm cold hearts, and touch dull consciences. And this kind of irony I can conceive to have been often upon Christ's lips when he came into intellectual collision with a people who were too far below him to comprehend him: who could not hear his words

without misunderstanding them: who obstinately attached a material meaning to phrases which he uttered in a deep spiritual sense. Some accommodation was necessary to bring his mind in any degree into contact with those of his hearers; and, in a sense, his only way of marking his disagreement from their crude conceptions was to seem to agree with them. And so, too, in regard to the whole conception of their future life which at one time the Apostles undoubtedly entertained. They dreamed of they hardly knew what; but certainly of good things desirable after the fashion of the world—a visible victory over the enemies of Israel achieved by their means, a palm of triumph in their hands, and a throne at their Master's side. I do not pretend to determine the limits of his prescience: but he discerned only too clearly that his enterprize was a failure; that persecutions, poverty, prisons, wounds, death, awaited those who still clung to it; and that if conquest was to come at last, it could only be when more than one generation of martyrs and confessors had borne their witness and given their blood. And can you not fancy how, with these certainties established in his soul, he might look round upon their faces, eager and bright with insubstantial day-dreams, and a sad, kind smile would rise to his lips as he meditated the contrast between expectation and reality?

Bishop Thirlwall begins his essay with the words—

"Some readers may be a little surprised to see irony ascribed to a tragic poet;" if so, it may seem stranger still to you that I should speak of the irony of Christ. But the explanation of the wonder in either case is, that irony, in the sense which I have given to it, cannot be separated from human life and therefore from human speech; while, if all that I have said be true, it is not the lowest men, nor they in their lowest moods, who are most conscious of it. Without this aid, I am quite unable to explain the words of the text; with it, all is easy, straightforward, natural. For a moment, Jesus, who sees the crude material conceptions which are floating through the minds of Peter and the rest, seems to fall in with them and to accord with them. Yes, he says, you have left nothing for my sake and the gospel's which shall not be repaid to you in kind, and that an hundred-fold—houses, and lands, and mothers, and sisters, and children. Your wandering life with me shall come to an end: you shall no longer be dependent upon chance hospitality, but settled in sure possessions: you came to me poor, you shall leave me rich. Is it not easy to imagine that Peter and the other Apostles, who, after all, were not wholly unspiritual, in whose minds the new thought and the old still mingled and strove for pre-eminence, wondered at this strange teaching, which was so contrary to all that had gone before, and seemed to echo, not the stronger, but the weaker part of them-

selves? Was there no flash in the Master's eye, no moral scorn in his voice, no curving smile upon his lip, as he spake? Then what was the meaning of that unexpected qualification, "with persecutions"—suddenly turning into view the other side of the shield, and leaving them as best they could to reconcile the incompatibilities of the contrast? Persecutions and houses and lands! Persecutions and the dear delights of home! Persecutions and the absence of self-sacrifice!—how do these things go together? And again the note deepens: "and in the world to come, eternal life. But many that are first shall be last, and the last first." We have moved into a quite different moral region now: the irony has vanished from eye and lip and word, and remains, if at all, only in the swift and decisive contrast between the later and the earlier phrase. To live with that deep, poignant, unchangeable Divine Life which we call Eternal, is the main thing: what can houses and lands have to do with that? But in that life all earthly distinctions are confounded and reversed, as if to show how radically different it is from the worldly order, to which for a little while Peter's thoughts had pointed: its grades of honour depend upon other conditions, its degrees of happiness are attainable by other methods: the first shall be last, and the last first.

So that, after all, this is not, as you might suppose at first sight, a receipt for "making the best of both

worlds," but a declaration, not the less impressive for its paradoxical form, that their principles, their order, their rewards, are fundamentally different. I have pointed the moral for you a hundred times, and it is not necessary to enlarge greatly upon it now. I think that we have finally emerged from the old Hebrew notion that the appropriate rewards of goodness are length of days, unbroken prosperity, and children to carry on our name; and that a pious man who misses this recognition of his piety, has just ground of complaint against the goodness of God. But notions not distantly akin to this obstinately hold their place in our minds: we are still too apt to invest in religion, and to grumble if the interest is not paid in precisely the coin that we like. Yet no man, I suppose, ever truly loved God, and worked for Him with a pure heart, and gave himself wholly up to His will, without feeling that, whatever of what the world called misfortune might befal him, he was more than content with his toil and his wages. To be at peace with one's own conscience: to know that one is spending one's strength, with least waste and largest result, in the line of Divine purpose: to have a sure refuge in temptation, a constant defence in trouble: to be emancipated from fear of change and pain and death, and, no matter what disappointment may come, in the faith of the kingdom to

> Bate not a jot of heart or hope,
> But steer right onward,—

what better thing can there be than this? It is the rounded symmetry of human powers, the reached goal of human life.

I have spoken, in a well-known phrase, of making the best of both worlds. In truth, there is but one world, a single kosmos. What is not kosmos is chaos, what is not order is disorder. When our eyes close for ever on the beauty of earth, and the wretchedness which human passions have made in the midst of it, we cannot conceive of ourselves as passing into a different state of things, where other moral laws prevail, and God works after a different fashion. Or if for a moment I were to adopt the phrase two worlds, I should say that they were coincident, not consecutive: that here and now there was a world in which God's laws were recognized and obeyed, and another all round about it, perhaps more visible, in which men tried to live their life according to laws of their own. So there are not two kingdoms, to which we may justifiably feel a divided allegiance, and whose conflicting claims we must endeavour to reconcile, but one only, now and always, here and beyond the veil; and all outside of it, a condition of things without law, without order, without divine issue, unless it be gradual absorption in the other and nobler state. To which, O friends, do we belong, by allegiance, by aspiration, by obedience? Our allegiance to the kingdom of God may be imperfect, our obedience inter-

mittent, our aspirations uncertain: but we must make a choice in our hearts between it and the kingdom of the world; between principles and methods and rewards of the divine order, and what stand for these in what is truly no order at all. The whole secret of life lies in this alternative. Unrest, indecision, self-dissatisfaction, slowly-fading happiness, declining strength, a cheerless and faithless death, on this side; on that, settled peace, a fixed will, a conscious communion with God, an ever-enlarging life, a clear outlook to better things to come. Who that could see the end from the beginning, who that could hold passion in check and trample base affection under foot, could for a moment falter in his choice?

XXI.

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God.

MATTHEW vi. 33:

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

THIS is a hard saying: one which we may easily read a thousand times, passing it by with little notice, yet which, if our attention be once arrested, we recognize as having a deep and difficult meaning. For when we have to some extent attenuated the significance of the whole passage by the recollection that the words, "take no thought for," would be more accurately translated, "be not anxious about," there still remains the fact that we can see no connection between "the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and the food, the drink, the raiment, which are to be added to those who are intent upon the nobler quest. The two orders of things, the spiritual and the temporal, seem incomparable, incommen-

surate; and we are conscious of a moral incongruity when they are brought together. And, indeed, this incongruity is the key-note of the whole passage, which rises to its highest pitch in the words, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Choose we may—indeed, but for the notorious fact that we are always seeking to avoid the election, I should say, choose we must—between the world and the kingdom; but surely the choice of one involves the rejection of the other, and we are content to balance temporal loss by spiritual gain. But does this enigmatical saying seem to mean that it is after all possible to make the best of both worlds, and somehow to serve God without altogether breaking with mammon? Perhaps some such indefinite conviction as this lies at the bottom of our practice. We do take thought, and anxious thought too, for food and drink and raiment, and all the things of the flesh which these symbolize; and we have some genuine, if intermittent, desire for "the kingdom of God and His righteousness." But we usually invert the order of the text: the world first, and then for God what we can spare from the world. And I think we should certainly call fanatic a man who deliberately took the text in its plain and literal meaning as the rule of his life.

We may of course say, if we choose, that the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the immediate disciples of Christ, who were a race set apart, a peculiar people,

devoting their lives to the task of aiding him to establish the kingdom of God. Or, again, we may regard this, and other difficult sayings of a similar kind, as counsels of perfection, embodying an ideal, not for immediate practical purposes, but to which humanity may be expected gradually to approach. But neither of these opiates will long delude a living conscience: on the one hand, general principles of living are equally applicable to all men under all circumstances; on the other, an ideal ceases to be an ideal when we no longer strain to reach it. Something, indeed, of the local, the temporary, there may be in this word of Christ's; but if so, it can only be in the expression, not in the thought; and a free translation of it into the language of to-day will elucidate, if not remove, the difficulty. Let me at least make the attempt.

The objects of life may be divided into two classes, not difficult to distinguish, though perhaps not easy to label with appropriate names. But one of them we cannot do wrong in calling the ideal; the other we will describe and discuss by-and-by. Let me first observe that I am not now upon distinctively religious ground; I am dealing with general facts of human life, true of every man, whether he have any theological belief or not. The question which we have to ask ourselves is, What is our first interest? What do we care most for? What is it that we refuse to postpone to anything else? Is it, for instance, in

the abstract world, truth? In the personal world, duty? In the social world, the common weal? These are ideal ends, devotion to which, we notice, takes a man out of himself, sets his soul in a large place, fires him with quite unwonted enthusiasm, enables him to make large sacrifices, strengthens him for long-continued toil, sometimes bids him throw away life itself. Some of these ideal ends of life are more moving, more inspiring, than others: as, for instance, devotion to mathematical truth may still leave a man's spirit imprisoned within narrow intellectual and moral limits, while the power which a pure patriotism has in uplifting and enlarging the soul can hardly be overestimated; and a genuine allegiance to the kingdom of God cleanses, strengthens, fires a man, as nothing else can do. But they all move, they all inspire, in their degree. To every soul that strains after them, they are a principle of growth, a method of education. Eyes which are set on them cannot regard with satisfaction whatever is mean and base. Hearts that beat for them have their true life in a world unseen, purer, brighter, less subject to change, less open to loss, than this.

Now to the ideal I cannot oppose the real, for that would be to abandon my central contention, that the unseen things alone have a true and eternal being. Visible is a word that is not distinctive enough: selfish, may carry too sharp a sting of blame with it: personal,

may be claimed by either side of the controversy. But if words fail me, you are at all events by this time beginning to see what I mean. There are certain ends of life other than the ideal, and even more inextricably interwoven with the stuff of existence, but which all have a certain inward and self-regarding reference—a livelihood, personal comfort and consideration, rising perhaps into luxury, and a conspicuous place in society—what have been called, with little regard to the feelings of the rich, "the lust of the flesh and the pride of life." But whatever differences there may be among these things, and however they range through the whole of the moral gamut, as I shall show you in a moment, they all belong to the visible and temporal order: they are to be apprehended by the senses: there is in them an inherent principle of decay and change. I admit at once that they are a part of life which cannot be dispensed with: they belong to its physical basis: sought for in moderation and under rigorous self-restraint, they supply a large part of its innocent, its habitual, its lasting pleasures. But the moment you compare a good dinner, which there is no harm in eating—a beautiful house, in which it is a desirable thing to dwell—costly and tasteful clothing, which is at all events better than slovenly ugliness,—with a new truth, a kind action, a genuine sacrifice of self,—you feel instinctively that the former belong to a lower plane of being, and that in the very act of

comparison you are committing treason to the nobler capabilities of human nature. And there is this great and instructive difference between these two kinds of human ends—that if you give yourself up unreservedly to the first, the result is larger power and deeper insight; if to the second, a decline into base selfishness, a perpetually narrowing soul, a heart growing colder from day to day. Yes, I must eat; but the moment I begin to take constant or frequent thought of eating, I run the risk of becoming that most contemptible of all small sinners, an epicure. And why take ye thought for raiment? Is there any creature of God's more fallen from her high estate than a woman who is perpetually anxious about her clothes, and quite careless of her children? Whereas, of allegiance to truth, of devotion to duty, of anxiety for the common weal, no man, no woman, can have too much: under this inspiration the heart is enlarged, the conscience is quickened, and life hourly becomes wider and more intense.

Now as Christ, in spite of counsels of perfection and principles of absolute sweep, was the sanest of moralists, we nowhere find him enjoining exclusive devotion to the higher order of things, and complete neglect of the lower. That is just the asceticism which is so ready to grow out of any spiritual religion, and is, in fact, the monkish corruption of Christianity. What he does say—and it is a principle of infinite impor-

tance—is, that we must choose which of the two shall be uppermost in our lives; which of the two shall furnish their regulative principle; which, should they come into collision, as may be the case at any moment of existence, shall yield to the other. "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness." I do not doubt that the double order of motive exists in every soul now before God in His house: no one wholly lives in the ideal, no one wholly in the physical: the first the necessities of life perpetually recall to the tangible earth, the second must be poor and base indeed if he do not sometimes feel upon his forehead airs from heaven. Nor are we always the same men at different times: moods vary, changing circumstances sway us, the breath of the Spirit comes and goes, blowing, like the wind, as it listeth. But at the same time there are men of the flesh and men of the spirit: lives that belong to the seen, and lives that belong to the unseen world: tempers through which a strife after the ideal always runs, and again tempers which, if the world goes prosperously with them, sit still and are content. And this is a fundamental difference among men, that which marks them out as on the side of God, of Christ, of duty, or, on the other hand, of the world, of the flesh, of self.

Still, what are we to make of "all these things shall be added unto you"? Because we believe, if we believe anything—and that not on any authority, but by

sure warrant of fact—that in the moral world also effects follow causes, and that the character of the effect lies hidden in the character of the cause. Would you be rich, and with riches acquire the power of purchasing whatever of comfort and luxury the world can give? You must have and use the qualities, the natural result of which is the accumulation of money: energy, industry, a keen eye for opportunities, a power of patient waiting till the right moment comes, an insight into other men's strength and weaknesses, and the like, which you may always observe in those who have raised themselves to affluence. But the men who possess these gifts are not necessarily, by any means, the poor in spirit, the meek, the hungering and thirsting after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, who have the promise of the kingdom of God. Why should the successful exercise of one order of gifts bring after it the rewards appropriate to the other? I am most certainly persuaded that it does not; and that the good things of the spirit, and the good things of the flesh, are each attainable only in their own way. But there is another way of looking at the matter, on which I have insisted over and over again, and of which, as I find it hard practically to convince myself, I may also easily fail to persuade you. And that is, that when the two orders of reward are brought face to face with each other, one appears, in comparison with the other, so

unspeakably poor, worthless, contemptible, as to vanish away, and to be of no account any more. You know the reply with which Michael Faraday astonished the man of business who pressed him to undertake researches which might probably result in signal advantage to himself: "I have no time to make money." With his laboratory at the Royal Institution, with the three or four hundred a-year which supplied his modest wants, with the boundless region of the unknown stretching out before him, and time subtly stealing from him day after day, year after year, what to him were a few paltry thousands, and all that they could buy? So, put love in one scale and luxury in another—here duty, and there self-indulgence—and if man or woman deliberately prefer the latter, as they so often do, to what can we ascribe it, except to some fatal blindness that conceals from them the true nature of the objects brought before them? For deliberately, and with full knowledge of what they are, to prefer evil to good, is the characteristic attribute of that theological figment, the devil.

So it may be that we have here one more instance of that which I have pointed out to you before—the irony of Christ. "Seek ye first," he says, "the kingdom of God and His righteousness," the true end of all noble human quest. Seek it with toil, seek it with patience, seek it with obedience, seek it with self-surrender; and at last, not easily, but as a strong

runner touches the goal, breathless, weary, half-despairing of success in the very moment of victory, ye shall find it. And ye shall know that ye have found it by the new strength that is poured into you, by the happy peace which is the portion of your hearts, by your perfect reconciliation with yourselves, with your fellow-men, with God. And to one who thus lives the life of God, what are meat and drink and raiment, and all that they stand for? Necessary things, no doubt, in their place and degree; but to be made a chief object of existence, to be a large constituent of happy or unhappy living, to ask the best of our thoughts, to tax the hardest of our efforts! Yea, children, I seem to hear Christ say, when ye have won your crown, undoubtedly such good things as ye need shall be added unto you. But ye will know, too, of how small account they are in the life of the children of God. He who loves God, he whom God loves, hath all things.

There is not, then, so great a gulf as might at first sight be supposed between the words of my text and that terrible declaration, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." It all comes to a comparative estimate of the two ends of living. No sophistry can make them one, or confound the distinction between them. Here, too, that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. But can we not, I hear some voice reply, live both lives, and cun-

ningly mingle luxury, selfishness, indifference to human welfare, with self-denial, beneficence, pity? Can we not unite a devotion to the ideal objects of life, with a refined indulgence in every pleasure that solicits the senses? Undoubtedly, in your own self-estimate; but one day the Judge will come, who knows his own, and will summarily set aside the sheep from the goats. But what if there be no Judge, no great assize of all souls, no signal retribution—but death the end of life, one long dreamless sleep that knows no waking? Ah! now we are at the bottom of things, and faith and unfaith fairly face to face. I declare that there *is* a Judge, because judgment is of the very stuff of life itself: because our actions carry with them their own retribution: because it is not necessary to await that last day that may never dawn, to show our existence in its true colours. I know no life so utterly futile and mistaken as one of perpetual self-pleasing. Luxury soon ends by wearing itself out. The excitement of pleasure finds, all too late, that it cannot hasten the leaden feet of time. Pain spares no roof-tree: death knocks at every door: loss is common to the race. What will dainty meats and clothes of the costliest fashion do for the pangs of cancer? When your child is taken from you, will the pictures on your walls be much comfort? Life itself, in its heyday and in its slow decline, is not the same thing; and you will find your resources of physical luxury fail you

most, precisely when you stand most in need of them. Whereas all the spiritual gifts, motives, ends, which are the opposite of these things, have this in them, that they belong to the very life of the soul, and last in fullest vigour as long as it lasts: that they are not palled by custom, or weakened by lapse of time, or accomplish less for old age than for youth. For who that ever did well can be weary of well-doing? What end to the endlessness of love, what limit to the infinity of duty? And for the sorrows that must come, the pains that must be borne, the valley of death through which we must needs pass, there is no other resource than that unwearied love of God which the most miserable of human beings never yet implored in vain, and in communion with which no agony is intolerable, no grief without a solace. Had we the Cross full in view, it were best for us to live, best to die, with Christ. If only we have found the kingdom of God and His righteousness, not even the Divine Omnipotence can add to us anything worthy to be taken into account.

XXII.

The Gifts of God without Repentance.

ROMANS xi. 29:

"For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance."

THE two last words of the text are not without obscurity, though the translators have done no more than reproduce a similar ambiguity in the Greek. And the meaning is indeed sufficiently plain from the context. Paul is full of his argument—which is of such paramount importance to him, though it sounds old-fashioned and unreal to us—of the substitution of the Gentiles for the people of God in the realization of the Divine promises, and yet of the final restoration of the Hebrews to their original place in the favour of Jehovah. We need not now enter into its tortuous windings, nor inquire how far it answers his polemical purpose: the one thing for us to notice is the interpretation it gives to the words which we are considering. It is God who does not repent of His gifts, and who never revokes His calling. The

bounties which He showers upon men are absolute, ungrudging, unrepented of, no matter how they may be neglected, scorned, misused; and though those whom He has once called are deaf to the voice of His invitation, it remains valid so long as the lamp of life burns down to its last feeble flicker. Ages come and go; the waves of political change sweep over the nations; human hearts alternately open themselves to God, or turn away from the light of His love: but the goodness of God stands fast for ever.

Perhaps certain common and universal blessings, which we hardly recognize as blessings until we lose our part in them for a while, are the most obvious illustration of this truth. The air we breathe, the stream that flows with babbling ripple at our feet, the tide that rises and falls and moans for ever on our shores, the multitudinous leaves which the fresh wind stirs into perpetual rustle, the orderly succession of the flowers, the clouds that chase one another across the sky, the pomp of the day as it alternately dies and is re-born—all these may serve as types of a large class of God's gifts, which are indeed precious beyond measure to every one of us, but which are so universal, so uninterrupted, that no man would dream of taking them to himself. They form the steadfast background and scenery of our lives, which would be other than they are without them: nor are those our least happy, our least living moments, at which we feel that nature's

sap flows in our veins also, and that we too are a part of all we see. I am afraid that we rarely refer these things to God's bounty at all: they are conditions of life, and we do not pause to consider that they might have been other than they are: they are the result of universal law, so wide in its sweep as to exclude all consideration of individuals, rather than magnificent examples of what I will venture to call God's grand prodigality, His large and unrepentant goodness, "which maketh His sun to shine upon just and unjust, and sendeth down His rain even upon the evil and unthankful." See how the sun flames upon the sea, lonely of every ship, and overspreads with evening gold the inaccessible recesses of the ice-bound hills! See how the orchid unfolds its strange beauties in the pathless forest, though for years no traveller pass that way! There are secrets of beauty which Nature keeps locked up in her own heart for centuries, till at last she reveals them to the predestined eye: as again there are others displayed from day to day, as by a kind of divine obstinacy, to eyes that will not see, and hearts that will not feel. But all these things unite in making one impression. The gifts of God are without repentance. He scatters His boundless wealth over the earth, and who will may take it up. He grudges nothing, He withdraws nothing; and to each the measure of the gift is in proportion to his capacity of receiving.

In these last words we catch sight of a practical limitation of the principle which I am illustrating. The vessels of the human spirit are not of equal capacity: each can take only what it can hold of what God is willing to give. To the tired day-labourer, the signs of the sky are only an indication of the flight of time, giving promise of the hour when the plough shall be stayed in the furrow, and the long day's work be done: while to Wordsworth they are the voice of majestic Nature, the tokens of the living God, notes in the endless anthem of revelation. We all know what it is to have the window by which our soul opens upon the world closed or darkened: some sickness makes us count the beatings of our own heart, and we can no longer hear the music of the spheres: some overpowering anxiety turns all our thoughts inward, and the goodliest landscape displays itself before our dull eyes in vain. We complain then that Nature is impassive, that she looks with the same unsympathetic—I was almost going to say the same ghastly—smile upon our most joyful hilarity and our most abject woe; and we bitterly reflect that what we took for community of feeling between ourselves and her, was no more than the delusion of our own fancy. And whatever it may be, it is all bounded by our threescore years and ten. Grass grew, and flowers broke into beauty, and tides rose and fell, and the sun blazed upon the brow of day, infinite years before our eyes

looked upon them; nor will the closing of our eyes affect for a moment that magnificent procession of natural laws and forces of which beauty is the outward expression. We are on a higher plane, we are wont to say, than that of Nature, inanimate and animate. But she remains; while the seeing eye, the hearing ear, the interpreting brain, pass away. It is the strangest thing that the very places with which living we are most closely identified, will not miss us when we are dead. From the natural point of view, it seems as if the lower the organism, the greater its faculty of permanence; as the rock, which feels neither wind, nor sun, nor rain, nor frost, in the dull impassibility of its eternal existence, remains to bear witness to the days when the elements were seething in primeval strife, and the foundations of the earth were firmly laid.

And this suggests to us another thought, that in some of God's gifts may be a quality of boundedness which nevertheless does not interfere with the large and unrepentant character of His liberality. And this natural limitation may spring either from the fixed and irrevocable conditions of human life, or be justified by considerations in connection with His providence on which we are able to lay only a conjectural grasp. For perhaps it is the difficulty of my position, that while I am asserting that God's gifts are without repentance, all experience seems to show that He

constantly repents of them, and withdraws as freely as He gives. Is not all our life an alternation of gain and loss? Is there anything that we can call our own? May we not at any moment be, not invited, but compelled, to resign into God's hands whatever we hold most precious? It seems as if nothing that man can do or be were worth God's keeping: "the world fulfils itself in many ways," and He breaks remorselessly the human instrument of His will. No tongue is so eloquent that He will not reduce it to silence: no life of such account for love or service that He will not still its pulses: no gift so indispensable to man or woman that He will not take it away, and command that the experiment of existence shall be tried without it. Amid the awe-struck silence which follows these signal strokes of His hand, I seem to hear in the quiet voice which drops from heaven, the words, "Be still, and know that I am God"—a warning, which will not be slighted, that His thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor His ways as our ways; and with the warning, too, an indication that perhaps, after all, His method of blessing may not be the same as ours, and that there may be deeper mysteries in His gifts than we know.

What shall we say, for instance, of two of God's greatest gifts—youth and beauty? Are we to cry out against His goodness because it lies in the nature of things that either must fade? Talk we never so wisely, they are the choicest fruit out of the orchard of heaven:

for these we would pay any possible price: to have the world once more before them, with a tide of resistless energy flowing through their veins, and a face and bearing that at once conciliate all love, is what the old desire beyond all else, though they acknowledge it all the while to be the impossible dream of fancy. But are we to deny that God's gifts are without repentance because this cannot be? Is it a stigma upon His liberality that no man can live his life twice over? Or can we not go a little deeper in search of moral considerations that may redress the balance? A dissolute youth—a youth that spends itself for nought—a youth that passes into manhood with physical energies already beginning to fail, and no manly qualities as yet ripening—a youth whose freshness is smirched with foul self-indulgence—a youth which has wandered away from the true path of life so far that return to it must be the bitter labour of years,—who would exchange for this the remnant, small though it may be, of days well spent, and the slackening tide of energies that have always been nobly employed? And it may be that our ideal of beauty, too, changes as we grow old. A bright young face, with its eager gaze upon life, is always a pleasant thing to look upon, and, in spite of all mock-wise adages that beauty is only skin-deep, the loveliest thing of God's handiwork. Eyes must be dull, hearts must be cold indeed, that are too old to feel its charm. But though the eyes

may lose the brightness that was never dimmed with tears, though wrinkles of anxiety and sorrow may plough their way across the waxen smoothness of the cheek, I can conceive of a higher and more ethereal beauty that shall be the result: a beauty that tells of unexhausted and triumphant love that has tried itself almost to the death and is unspeakably content: a serenity that betokens the full solution of life's problem: a hope that cannot admit the possibility that it should ever be shamed. So there is a youth which mounts towards, and is lost in, the life of God which is ever young, and a beauty which reveals itself more and more as it puts on the lineaments of the Eternal Loveliness.

I am minded to say something in this connection of God's intellectual gifts to men. I suppose there are those who very closely associate these with themselves: they think of their own labour, study, self-training, and the result seems to them as much their own as the money which they earn or the fame which they win. I own that I cannot help taking an opposite view. When I think how different each man is from every other: how his intellectual capacities and peculiarities belong to him from his birth: how these are brought into one coherent energy by circumstances over which to a large extent he has no control—I am compelled to look upon the intellectual as being as much God's handiwork as the physical man, and the

two as bound together by one thread of divine purpose. It is no personal presumption on my part, but a legitimate deduction from my theory of life, that I have long heard the voice of God in my ears exhorting me to make the best of what strength there is in me, to preach with what force and persuasiveness I can the things that seem to me to make for truth and righteousness, to stand in a careless and often ungodly world for God and His kingdom. With what inefficient industry, often with what shameful cowardice, I have fulfilled my mission, none knows so well as I: in spite of many failures, God has been gracious to me far beyond my deserts. But when there has come a time at which silence has been my portion instead of speech, and I have not known whether I should ever be able to speak again: when the plan of my life has been, as it were, prematurely broken, and all that seemed left to me was to shape the fragments as best I could into something new—shall I complain of the unrepentant goodness of God, or deem His liberality less large than once I thought, because this element of limitation was in my powers from the first, and it was only my presumption that bade me think that I could put forth unimpaired strength for ever? The earth closed only a few days ago over the body of a friend and brother who was younger than I, and assuredly inferior to no man in faithfulness to his Master. Why should one be taken, and another left? Ah! there is

no repentance in the gifts of God: to one He says, "Speak on yet a little;" to another, "Hold thy peace for evermore:" and perhaps when one remembers imperfections of apprehension, and dulness of insight, and slips of the tongue, silence is the better part. Only with Him there is no wrong.

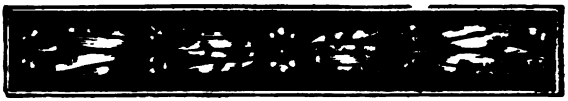
But there is one thing, it will be said, in which my theory breaks down decisively—the loss of friends. The gifts of God without repentance! Why does He allow one human being to grow into another's heart, and from that growth to spring all the sweetest flowers of intercourse, all the noblest fruits of character, and then in an instant tear it all up, leaving only a ghastly, gaping chasm which can never close again? I need not recapitulate the cases which the sad experience of every day makes familiar to us: God's best gift to man is a faithful friend, and he holds none by so insecure a tenure. We meet the blow in different ways, according to the differences of our nature; for the most part, I think, looking to time as an anodyne which will do its slow work if only we be patient, and letting, as it were, the healing hand of nature pass over us. But how can we more accurately describe this giving and taking away, than by saying that God has repented of His gift? For once, surely, He has not given unreservedly. Why dash the cup from our lips at the moment at which we tasted all its sweetness?

But what if the hour has arrived (I put forward

my solution of the problem only conjecturally) at which the cup would be sweet to us no longer? Is not our complaint based upon the assumption that it would be well for us if all things always continued in one stay? May not there be here also a limitation which God sees, though it be hidden from us? I can conceive it possible that it might be well for us to suffer the interruption of the dearest love that ever stirred our hearts. May it not be that the friend who passes behind the veil has for the present fulfilled his functions to us? If life be, as we believe, one long education, conducted by many methods, effected by many instruments, why should we charge against the goodness of God what may very well be among its most signal proofs? Vacant places in earthly service exist only to earthly eyes: God takes a servant into the hierarchy of heavenly work, only when He sees that his toil is here at an end. And if a friend leaves us, does it not mean that his earthly relation to us also has suffered completion? It is a hard doctrine in its application to certain cases: it declares that earthly work is virtually over at a moment when it seems to be most crying in its demands: it says to hearts that are palpitating with unfulfilled passion, "Be still: it is enough." But in spite of this, I cannot resist the conclusion that even these best and most personal gifts of God are without repentance: that He knows what, and how much, and for how long, He

gives: and that when He takes away, the stroke seems premature, not to His wisdom and bounty, but only to our ignorance.

I have spoken only weak and tentative words, and I know that there are gaps in my argument which any critical spirit will readily find. For there are two thoughts which in our relations to God contend together—the thought of love and the thought of law; the one making us personal recipients of His bounty, the other bidding us share in a world-wide distribution of benefit. And of the second, which is true as the first, though often hard to reconcile with it, I have said nothing. I have left with you but one thought: note it well, for it is not only true but consoling: God grudges us nothing that He gives, and all His gifts are without repentance.



XXIII.

The Calling of God without Repentance.

ROMANS xi. 29:

"For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance."

I SPOKE last Sunday of the gifts of God that are without repentance: my subject to-day is the calling which, once made, is never revoked.

As I have already remarked, Paul's historical allusion in this place is perfectly plain. He is thinking of Abraham, who was called from beyond the great river to become the progenitor of a peculiar people of God: of Jacob, in whom, as apart from Esau, the promise was confirmed: of all the spiritual privileges, all the mysterious expectations, that were the portion of Israel. It is only when our thoughts take a distinctively theological hue, and we fall half-unconsciously into the language of an older day, that we speak of the Hebrews as a peculiar people: we read their history otherwise than they themselves read it: we

recognize the part played in the advance of civilization by all the great ancient nations, and are by no means disposed to confine to Palestine the watchful favour of God. But we cannot help seeing that there is a natural as well as an artificial sense in which Israel was a peculiar people; and when we recollect that his function was to witness to the world of the unity and of the righteousness of God: to protest alike against multiplicity of deities, and worship of graven images, and ascription to gods of the worst vices of men: in a word, to carry in his bosom the germs of spiritual religion, and to foster them into life and growth—it only seems a natural use of speech to say that God called him, and separated him from the nations, and gave him a word to utter, a work to do. To trace the living thread of connection through the Old Testament, to put the great thoughts which it contains in their natural order of development, to restore the sequence which tradition and prejudice have confused, is a task which critical science finds just now very difficult; but the main facts are clear enough. There were periods of spiritual activity and periods of spiritual sluggishness: sudden outbursts of prophetic zeal, gradual fadings away into dulness of insight, commonness of life: but when the tide rose, to what a height did not its waters leap, and all the air was freshened and grew keen! We have no language even yet but that of prophet and psalmist to express our highest aspiration,

our deepest contrition, our heartiest praise, our most passionate loyalty to righteousness. And then there came long ages, in which, when prophecy had gradually died away into silence, the legal was substituted for the poetical conception of religion; and for Isaiah singing of the immutable laws of righteousness, and the Evangelical Prophet announcing afar off the work and sorrows of the Servant of the Lord, there were Rabbis teaching in their schools a complicated system of ceremonial traditions, and Scribes overlaying the law with superfluous comment, and Pharisees putting upon the people's shoulders burthens greater than they could bear. But the calling of God is without repentance. Israel, once His messenger, is His messenger always. The message may drop from faithless lips, may be obliterated from the unbelieving heart, but the gift is always there, and the possibility. And so out of the schools of the Rabbis, from the very midst of Pharisee and Scribe, suddenly spoke one who, though only a carpenter's son of Galilee, was also the last and greatest of the Prophets, and the music of his voice entranced the world. Nations too easily forget God's calling: but He never revokes it.

Were I to seek to illustrate this idea by modern instances, I might not only be accused of talking politics in the pulpit, but I should inevitably occupy ground where difference of opinion would meet me at every step. Do you recollect the phrase, "effectual

calling"? It belongs to a very different theological region from that in which we live and move—a region which, I believe, is to all modern thinkers, no matter how deeply religious they may be, growing dim and distant. It brings back to us the idea of God, in the uncontrolled exercise of His will, predestinating certain of His human children to eternal life, and in the same act condemning all the rest to eternal death. There is the great mass of men, outwardly indistinguishable the one from the other in their relations to the tremendous realities of another world, though separated by the widest diversities of moral aspiration and achievement, which have, however, nothing to do with their future fate. Except to the eye of Eternal Wisdom, there is no star, the promise of future blessedness, upon the foreheads of the chosen: there is no black mark, the sign of unutterable woe to come, upon the faces of the rejected. But God calls His own with an effectual calling. Yet, alas for the irony of His ways! it is His will that all should be called; and the messengers go far and wide, bearing with them the promise of the Cross, till, if it may be, every human ear has heard it. But by the majority it is heard only to be rejected; or if they think they understand and accept it, they are under a fatal delusion: you cannot enlarge the roll of the elect, though it be only by one: and God's will, registered in the ages before time was, and without reference to human striving and yearning,

stands fast immutably. The calling is effectual only to the chosen. To all the rest it is a hollow mockery of grace.

I am not going to criticise this doctrine: I will only point out, as I have pointed out before, that in those who believe that God has called them, it helps to produce a very strenuous character. For a man to believe that God has given him a message to deliver, a work to do, and that till the task is accomplished he will be strengthened, upborne, guided, saved, will surely, if anything can, bear him victorious through the ills, and lead him through the labyrinths of life. Such men will certainly have their hours of doubt, hesitation, even abandonment: faith cannot always be maintained at its highest pitch; the spirit comes and goes at its good pleasure; there are moments at which they ask themselves whether their whole life be not a delusion, and the calling which has been its inspiration, a snare. And there have been cases, too, in which this strong conviction has nourished a strenuous, but not a scrupulous type of goodness: as if the nobleness of the main object of life, and the clearness with which it was held in view, sanctified all means of attaining it. How should the servant of God commit a wrong in doing God's work? What better thing than the conscious fulfilment of the Divine purpose? But with these drawbacks taken into account, much of the world's hardest and best work will be found to have

been done by men whose strength lay in the conviction that God had chosen them, and called them, and fitted them for His service, and would not forsake them till the end came. And here is the explanation of the seeming paradox that Calvinism at once crushes the human will into nothingness under the majesty and force of the Divine Will, and yet produces men of whom an unconquerable resolution, a patience that cannot be wearied, are the distinguishing characteristics.

But this is the election which carries with it reprobation as its accompanying negative. This is the calling which necessarily involves rejection with it. Is there, then, no other calling? Must we suppose that there are human ears utterly deaf to the invitation of God? Must we adopt what I cannot but call the revolting hypothesis, that the Divine Voice comes to all, and with it, to some, an inability to hear, imposed by the irresistible Will? We no sooner begin to consider these things, than we are caught in a kind of particularism, which is interwoven with the stuff of Christianity as it actually manifests itself along the ages. We think of Israel as enjoying the special favour of God, while the greater nations lie in spiritual darkness. We think of prophets as of men set apart to bring a divine message, and of the great mass of their countrymen as having no higher privilege than to listen and obey. We think of the Bible as of a closed book, essentially different in kind from all

other literature: the one, the word of God—the other, the word of man: that, final, authoritative, eternal—this, tentative, fallible, open to criticism, liable to reversal. And so, in spite of theories of the universal influence of the Spirit which all churches hold, and which, logically interpreted, ought to place every soul in direct communication with God, we shrink from the idea that every man is called with a calling of which God never repents, that the highest and completest consecration of self to a divine service is possible to every one of us, and that if our life falls away into the flatness and commonness of self-regard in which no mysterious voices echo, on which play no unearthly gleams, it is not that no word of God has ever come to us, but that we will not listen to it and obey.

That all this is contrary, almost painfully contrary, to our usual speech on such subjects, I well know. When a young man devotes his untried powers, and all the unspoiled enthusiasm of his age, to the work of the Christian ministry, we think of the act as one of self-consecration, in obedience to a secret mandate of the Spirit; though even here our language is often less reverent than our thought, and we lightly talk of professional considerations, and greet with a smile of goodnatured scorn what looks like any compliance on his part with common worldly motives. But why should we not speak of a divine call to the work of a chemist or a physicist? The hidden laws and struc-

ture of Nature early affect the imagination of some bright-brained youth: of every kind of knowledge, this is the most fascinating to him: he puts all his soul into the task of learning what men already know, and grown to manhood himself, he starts on an independent journey of discovery. I will take such a life at the highest: I will assume that his leading motive is neither fame nor profit, but the investigation of the truth: I will suppose that he takes a genuine pleasure in the enlargement of the kingdom of human knowledge, and thinks years of toil well spent for such a reward. We are treading here very near the confines of the religious life, even though our investigator hardly names the Holy Name: love of truth, industry, self-denial, patience, abstinence from coarse and common pleasures, the love of an ideal life, are qualities which he must have if he is to answer to my description. But how susceptible is such a life to religious inspiration and illustration! How fully, how easily, does it answer to the idea of a divine calling! For if such a man were happy enough to be able to believe that this, and no other, were the work for which God had given him his peculiar powers: if he felt that in deciphering the secrets of Nature's book he were indeed reading the will and character of God in words of no ambiguous meaning,—what a severity of ethical self-restraint might not be given him, what a power of growth into rounded strength and complete efficiency!

And if he were convinced, as I am convinced, that this too is an age of revelation, in which God is speaking to man in the very success with which He permits him to explore the secrets of His ways, he might humbly take his place among the prophets of the Highest, and feel that it were not profane to regard his abstract calculations, his most daring hypotheses, as the words of the living God.

But all this, it may be said, is not incongruous with any form of what may be called the ideal life. The painter, the sculptor, the architect, each in his degree, may keep before his eyes the Eternal Loveliness, which is at once the archetype and consummation of all earthly beauty; and so far as he is able to look upon his vocation as a divine calling, and to do his work under a sense of responsibility to God, will his life be sweet and strong, and a reflection of sweetness and strength visible in his works. Still, what of common avocations, daily duties, in which there is no ideal element? Are there indeed such? Are there any lives on which the light of heaven does not sometimes shine, except indeed those which wilfully love the darkness? A full half of the population in any civilized country is chiefly concerned with what, I fear, are beginning to be considered the unimportant interests and duties of home. I have nothing to do now with desires and aspirations which take women, especially young women, so largely into independent spheres of

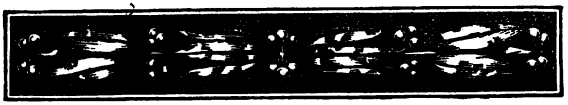
action, nor does the extent of my personal sympathies with this kind of social movement matter to my present argument. By all means let them go where duty takes them, and with strenuous heart and fixed will bring to some successful solution the problem of their life! What I care to insist upon now is, that there is no condition of life in connection with which it is easier to think of a divine calling than that of a good wife and mother. It is concerned, I know, with an infinitude of petty details, often monotonous, sometimes irksome: to perform its duties successfully requires rigorous self-denial, constant self-restraint: it fills but a small place in the eye of the world. But its ruling spirit is love: its ample reward is love: and love is only another name for God. If peace and love are in themselves the very atmosphere of heaven, then is a happy home the nearest likeness of heaven which we can realize on earth. And the denizens of heaven are the angels.

Hitherto I have spoken of divine calling in connection with the whole stuff of a man's life, the choice of his occupation, the daily employment of his powers. Nor do I believe that there is any way of life at all in which it is lawful for a conscientious man to engage, to which this idea is not applicable, and to which it will not supply strength and nobleness and sweetness. But there are what I may call the side channels of life, to which it applies just as much. Is it fanciful,

for instance, for the merchant who employs the full strength of his powers in being a good merchant, in ruling his counting-house kindly and justly, and in spreading the influence of even-handed integrity all over the world, to believe that God has called him to some religious or charitable work among the poor of his own city—or should he not obey the call in the same spirit of serious self-consecration in which the prophet performs his lofty function? Or if the artizan, tired at the end of his long day's work, still feels an impulse to try to do some good at the night-school or the boys' club, shall he not believe that his heart is moved by the Spirit of God, and that, though by the humblest gate, he is entering the highest service? And the calling of God, like His gifts, is without repentance. He relaxes no responsibility, He discharges no servant. The heart that He has once touched is bound to His behests for ever: no night, not even the night of death, darkens upon His day of toil. It is we who grow weary of well-doing: it is we who delude ourselves that we have done enough, and that it is time for younger labourers to take our place. I cannot associate the idea of faithfulness with temporary service: there seems to me to be no stranger and sadder thing than that a man should feel the deep delight of having his hand upon the plough of God, and be willing, though life and strength still last, to take it off. True service is eternal service.

Listen, then, I beseech you, brothers and sisters, for the voice of God speaking to your souls. None can hear it for another: to each individual spirit it comes in tones which each alone can recognize as divine. Perhaps some chance phrase of Scripture, a line of a hymn familiar from childhood, some word, fraught with deeper issues than I know, dropped from my own lips, may have been to-day an arrow that has found its mark: or, again, to-morrow, a suddenly recurring opportunity, or the solicitations of a friend—what else we know not—may swiftly reveal life in a fresh light, and put a new vigour into the performance of duty. Search your memories, and see if there be not some old aspiration unfulfilled, some scheme of holier and stronger life put aside for the moment, some heavenly vision to which you have hitherto been disobedient: the calling of God is without repentance. He called you then, He calls you now. Of one thing be sure—that He never meant your life to be a dull round of monotonous duties dully performed; still less a succession of poor pleasures, of frivolous excitements, upon which weariness always waits, and whereof dust and ashes are the end. He asks you, every day, every hour, to make it a divine service, animated by the loftiest hopes, sustained by the noblest motives; in which you cannot grow weary, for you will be re-invigorated by the freshness of the Eternal Strength; in which you cannot fail, for you labour on the side of Omni-

potence. He bids you note that all toil for the triumph of His will directly makes for human happiness; for His will is justice, mercy, peace, and these are the pillars upon which rests the welfare of mankind. And whoso serves Him truly is paid amplest wages, but in the incorruptible coin of the kingdom of heaven, which is neither mine nor thine, but the common wealth of all God's children.



XXIV.

The Soul's Loss of God.

SONG OF SOLOMON iii. 1, 2:

"By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not."

I AM going to follow the bad example of almost all commentators, at least since St. Bernard, and to put a mystic meaning on these words of the old Hebrew love-song. There can be no harm in doing so with our eyes open, so long as we distinctly acknowledge that we first put into the words the meaning which we afterwards draw out from them, and do not ascribe our spiritual refinements to a poet who, if foolish critics would only think so, is simple and straightforward enough.

My subject is the soul's temporary loss of God.

We are very apt to have confused notions of what it is to know God. I seldom hear the first words of

the creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty," without wondering how many different things they mean to the multitude which repeats them with one accord apparently so hearty. To one, they are the expression of simple, child-like belief, which cannot conceive of hesitation, which has never known a doubt; for another, they give words to an intellectual conclusion somewhat hardly arrived at, and not yet free from remembrance of its methods; in the mouth of a third, they are a careless affirmation, springing from no inner fountain of faith, and without effect on the life; while a fourth may utter them with a kind of hesitating reverence, as indeed too august for human lips, and containing a truth which no finite mind can fully grasp. But even when you give to the phrase "belief in God" its highest and best meaning, there is still a felt transition from it to knowledge of God. A human soul cannot know God without believing in Him; but it may only too well believe in Him without knowing Him. Always to feel His presence: always to have upon the spirit the touch of His awful hand: always to be able to speak with Him face to face: always to throw upon Him the burthen of pain, or sorrow, or anxiety, which is greater than we can bear: always to believe that all things work together for good to those who love Him, and, loving Him, always to abide the end in patience,—this is to know God. But it is manifest that of the hundreds of thousands who are

willing to cry loudly, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty," only a few here and there rise to this height of perfect knowledge and absolute trust.

But what I want to point out to you is, that those who have risen to it for a while are not always able to maintain themselves on so lofty an eminence. And when this is so, the words of the text describe their situation with quaint directness: "By night upon my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not. I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not." It is a strange thing, this withdrawal of God from the soul. There is no lack of affectionate yearning, of awful aspiration: it may very well be that the circumstances are such that the presence of the Great Companion, the conscious recourse to the love of God, would be an unspeakable boon. It might almost seem as if God were hardest to find when we needed Him most. Is, then, the promise withdrawn, Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you? And yet when this cloud is over a man's life, it is as if the heavens were as brass over his head, or as though his most passionate prayers dispersed themselves in empty air. "I sought him upon my bed"—this terrible loneliness envelopes the soul in the night-watches; and when it goes out into the city, and silently tells its tale in the streets and in the broad

ways, the company of men brings no relief, and it seems as if the busy world without, as well as its own quiet world within, were empty of God. And yet He is always the soul's Beloved, without whom it knows not how to live: whose presence is life and strength and consolation, whose absence is solitude indeed.

And observe that this is not the case so common in our own generation—the case which we have often studied and lamented—of one who loses God slowly and gradually, but for ever. It may be physical science, it may be material philosophy, it may be a keen sense of the world's wrongs and woes, it may be a general self-surrender to the critical spirit of the age, that drives a man into unbelief; the process, in one form or other, is constantly going on. And in many cases it is accomplished with throes and pangs not to be numbered: a loosening of the whole foundations of life: a necessity of finding new props and stays: an entrance into a colder, less hopeful, more self-sustained existence. But a man who loses sight of the supreme object of faith in this way never expects to see it again, but sets himself to grow used to the darkness and the loneliness: to believe that the former radiance was a delusion, and that all he can reckon on for the future is "the light of common day." God is not his soul's Beloved: if ever it was so, the dream has vanished away: he makes up his mind that lower loves, meaner affections, are all that are henceforth possible to him,

and learns to be content with them. Whereas the peculiarity of the case which we are considering is, that what the soul has lost, it once had, and hopes to have again: God was to it the sole reality, though now it seems as if He had disappeared into the darkness; and it marvels sadly at its own bereavement.

The truth, then, is, that this is a phenomenon, not of unfaith, but of faith. I do not suppose that any but devout and ardent spirits know what it is. To miss God, you must first have lived with Him: to find His absence a consuming sorrow, you must have felt His presence a real joy. People who say their prayers conventionally, go on saying them conventionally to the end: no tides of Godward emotion rise high or fall back far in their soul: no period of Divine intercourse is fuller or emptier of blessing than another. They have no doubts, because, in the real sense of the word, they never had any faith: as one who lived in a land where it was always twilight could imagine neither the glory of a summer noon nor the blackness of a starless night. But it is a very sad and perplexing fact—and if your own experience tells you nothing, take it on my word that it is a fact—when a soul that is accustomed to live in the presence of God, and to utter confiding prayers, not into the void, but to a Father's heart, finds all at once that the certainty which has been the mainstay of its life is no longer certain; and that with the utmost desire to

be as it once was, the world is suddenly empty of supernatural realities. Faith still feels after God, if haply it may find Him: prayer ascends, passionate as of yore, in hope that the answer will not always be delayed; there is an eager going back upon remembered trusts, a clinging recollection of better days. But for the time it avails nothing. There is no answer to prayer: there is not even a feeling that prayer deserves an answer. Reason will not help; it suggests more doubts than it answers; and the soul that has once known its Beloved, is sorrowfully aware that the most triumphant argument will bring it no nearer the goal of its desires. There is nothing for it but to wait till a season of refreshing descends from the presence of the Lord.

The records of religious biography are full of the fact of which I am speaking. I do not suppose that any one ever had a clearer and closer grasp of religious realities than Martin Luther. Not only was faith the central point of his system of theology, but it was the mainspring of his life. He lived and moved and had his being in the supernatural world. So definite were his perceptions, so confident his utterances, that, from the standpoint of a newer time, we feel almost inclined to criticise his habitual religious mood as deficient in the sense of awe, the apprehension of mystery. His whole life-history bears witness to this intensity of faith: how else, except in an over-

whelming conviction of certainty, should he have set himself against a hostile Church and world, and dared to break the traditions of ten centuries? Observe, I am not holding him up to admiration as the perfect model of what a saint and a reformer should be: some of the matters in which he has often been found fault with were the defects of his qualities: what he saw, he saw so clearly as to be impatient of others' differing insight: despotic in action, arrogant in controversy. But the point is, that this man, to whom the things of the unseen were habitually nearer than those of the visible world, was subject all his life to recurrent seasons of faithlessness and consequent despondency. His insight suddenly forsook him. If there were a God, he could not find Him, or found Him only to encounter His awful condemnation. All the religious truths of which he had been most certain were covered with a cloud of doubt. The motives that had governed his past life he no longer recognized as efficient: he did not know whether he had not been doing the devil's work instead of God's. If he turned to Scripture, it no longer seemed to confirm, but to condemn him: only a phrase here and there penetrated the crust that covered his soul with a healing balm of consolation. His own prayers seemed to come back to him, not only unanswered, but rejected, and he was fain piteously to implore the prayers of his friends. It was so to the very end of his life: no period of

spiritual sunshine was so long and bright, that it was not liable to be broken by a period of spiritual night. And Luther's experience might be paralleled by that of many other great and passionate souls: it is as if, in some natures, faith and unfaith were obverse and reverse of one medal: now they rejoice in God with all their strength, and again they seek their Beloved and find Him not.

We must be careful to note that this is a human, not a divine phenomenon. We cannot afford to lose sight of the general principle that God is ever waiting to be gracious, and that He never fails to respond to any genuine movement of a human heart towards Him. The fact of which I am speaking is, in a certain sense, analogous to the impossibility of finding God under which unrepentant sin labours. You cannot go to God in prayer with a conscious sin weighing on your heart, a sin which you know to be a sin, yet for which you are not sorry, which you are unwilling to give up: the words may form themselves upon your lips, but you know as you utter them that they are words only, and will not find God. Yet if you are thus excluded from the Divine Presence, the act of exclusion is your own: the door of the presence-chamber is shut against you because you have not chosen to comply with the indispensable conditions of admission. And so in the case of which I am speaking, in which no moral barrier divides the soul

from God, in which the soul passionately desires God, yet cannot find Him, the reason must lie in some hidden coldness and dryness of spirit, some self-centredness of which we are not conscious, some past unfaithfulness which corrupts our faith without our knowing it. It is not that God withdraws Himself from us, but that we unhappily, though all unconsciously, do not seek Him as He would and where He would be sought. And when again, after a while, the happy intercourse is restored—for the essence of the case is that it is only interrupted, not destroyed—when prayer is easy and natural, and the Divine Presence again illumines our life, and a childlike trust once more takes the burthen of our cares and anxieties off our own shoulders,—the reason is, that we have again found the way which we did not know that we had missed, and are able to offer to God the homage of a pure and humble heart.

And yet it is a divine phenomenon too. On any spiritual theory of religion, it is hard to say what, in the inner motions of the human soul, is divine and what is human: "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God," is a principle of universal application. And in the same way as it is a most important law of the spiritual universe, which we must ascribe to God Himself, that the impenitent soul is self-excluded from the Divine Presence, we are justified in believing that this recurrent loss of God,

however deep in the recesses of human incapacity its causes may lie, is a part of His general dealing with His children, and belongs to His method of spiritual education. Critics differ greatly as to the nature of Paul's thorn in the flesh; nor, in the absence of evidence, is it ever likely that their doubts will be resolved. But whatever it may have been, the method of its ethical and spiritual working is perfectly plain. It rebuked all growing self-confidence. It drove him back upon a divine fountain of strength. It forced upon him the conviction that all human courage and constancy are founded upon trust. It compelled him to rejoice with trembling, and to dare with fear. So I can conceive that Luther came out of one of his "Anfechtungen" with a deep thankfulness for the once more dawning light of faith, a fresh sense of his own incapacity and inconstancy, a new belief in the inexhaustible goodness of God. We hardly know what God is to our spirits till He seems for a time to have abandoned them. We are not fit for perpetual sunshine: we need the discipline of the night and the storm.

But when the night is actually upon us, what then? Shall we pour out our hearts to God, even though there be no answer? or shall we wait patiently, silently, till the morning dawns? I am supposing that the special difficulty which we are considering is not, at least in the first degree, an intellectual one. Whatever

reason we ever had for believing in God, we have still. Our mind has not lost its grasp of the argumentative facts of the case. We should shrink with as much horror as at any other time from the affirmation that we did not believe. Our difficulty—which is increased rather than lessened by the fact of our continual belief—is, that we cannot find Him whom yet we know to exist, and whose touch upon our souls has been aforetime so full of power. And so, saddening as it may be, it seems to me that it is well to obey the natural impulse of a devout spirit, and to wrestle with God for the boon which for the moment He refuses. There will be intervals of relief, gleams of light, snatches of consolation. There will be recollections of past struggles and past victories. There will be a looking back to days that were all sunshine. There will be a strong underlying faith in God's universal goodness to His children. And when at last "a light surprises the Christian as he sings," or prays, or waits quietly upon God, or labours, though in darkness, for the kingdom, he recognizes, with joy and thankfulness unspeakable, that

> It is the Lord who rises
> With healing on His wings!

So we fare on, brethren, in the spiritual as in the natural life, through alternate night and day. As I have already hinted, it is the great and passionate souls who feel this the most keenly, because they have

penetrated most deeply into the heart of the religious mystery. If, on the one hand, they sometimes lay hold of God with a force and insight denied to weaker spirits—on the other, they feel how His infinite awe and mystery elude all human grasp, how unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out; and it seems as if their very faith were an act of presumption, and He essentially beyond the reach of human ken. For supernatural realities, if I may so speak, avenge themselves upon those who hold them in too close and clear a grasp by retiring into the mystery which is their native element, and leaving the soul to its own incapacity. I sometimes think that we may be too familiar with the Infinite, and claim too large a knowledge of the Unknown and the Unknowable. And so we may be driven to seek Him whom our soul loveth, upon our bed, in the silence and solitude of night, or in the streets and on the broad ways where men most do congregate, and be compelled to return with the sad confession, "I sought Him, but I found Him not." Yet patience, patience, O sad soul! and He will be found. He hears the prayers which seem to awake no echo of divine acceptance. He marks the sorrowful aspirations of a disappointed heart. He accepts the work for the kingdom which is done in the twilight of dutifulness. The moment may be long delayed, but it will come, and the joy of it will outweigh the sorrow overpast. "As the hart